SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

Publiſhed from the original Manuſcripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A REVIEW of his GRACE's LIFE and CHARACTER.

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A REVIEW OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

DR. THOMAS SECKER, late Archbiſhop of *Canterbury*, was born in the Year 1693, at a ſmall Village called *Sibthorp*, in the Vale of *Belvoir*, *Nottinghamſhire*. His Father was a Proteſtant Diſſenter, a pious, virtuous, and ſenſible Man, who, having a ſmall paternal Fortune, followed no Profeſſion. His Mother was the Daughter of Mr. GEORGE BROUGH, of *Shelton*, in the County of *Nottingham*, a ſubſtantial Gentleman-Farmer. He received his Education at ſeveral private Schools and Academies in the Country, being obliged by various Accidents to change his Maſters frequently. Notwith-

ſtanding this evident Diſadvantage, at the Age of Nineteen he had not only made a conſiderable Progreſs in *Greek* and *Latin*, and read the beſt and moſt difficult Writers in both Languages, but had acquired a Knowledge of *French*, *Hebrew*, *Chaldee*, and *Syriac*, had learned *Geography*, *Logic*, *Algebra*, *Geometry*, *Conic Sections*, and gone through a Courſe of Lectures on *Jewiſh Antiquities*, and other Points, preparatory to the critical Study of the *Bible*. At the ſame Time, in one or other of thoſe Seminaries, he had the good Fortune to meet, and to form an Acquaintance, with ſeveral Perſons of great Abilities. Amongſt the reſt, in the Academy of one Mr. JONES, kept firſt at *Glouceſter*, then at *Tewkeſbury*, he laid the Foundation of a ſtrict Friendſhip with Mr. JOSEPH BUTLER, afterwards Biſhop of *Durham*. At the laſt of thoſe two Places it was that Mr. BUTLER gave the firſt Proof of his great Sagacity and Depth of Thought in the Letters which he then wrote to Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE; laying before him the Doubts that had ariſen in his Mind, concerning the Concluſiveneſs of ſome Arguments in the DOCTOR's *Demonſtration of the Being and Attributes of God*. Theſe were written with

ſo much Candour, Modeſty, and good Senſe, that, on the Diſcovery of his Name, they immediately procured him the Friendſhip of that eminent Man, and were afterwards printed at the End of his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*. This Correſpondence was entruſted in Confidence to Mr. SECKER, who, in Order to keep it private, undertook to convey Mr. BUTLER's Letters to the Poſt-Office at *Glouceſter*, and to bring back Dr. CLARKE's Anſwers.

Mr. SECKER had been deſtined by his Father for Orders amongſt the Diſſenters. With this View, during the laſt Years of his Education, his Studies were chiefly turned towards Divinity; in which he made ſuch quick Advances, that, by the Time he was Three-and-twenty, he had read over carefully a great Part of the Scriptures, particularly the *New Teſtament* in the Original, and the beſt Comments upon it; *Euſebius's Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, the Apoſtolical Fathers, Whiſton's Primitive Chriſtianity*, and the principal Writers for and againſt Miniſterial and Lay-Conformity; with many others of the moſt eſteemed Treatiſes in Theology. But though the Reſult of theſe Enquiries was (what might naturally be expected) a well-grounded Belief of the Chriſ-

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tian Revelation, yet not being at that Time able to decide on ſome abſtruſe ſpeculative Doctrines, nor to determine abſolutely what Communion he ſhould embrace; he reſolved, like a wiſe and honeſt Man, to purſue ſome Profeſſion, which ſhould leave him at Liberty to weigh theſe Things more maturely in his Thoughts, and not oblige him to declare, or teach publicly, Opinions which were not yet thoroughly ſettled in his own Mind. Therefore about the End of the Year 1716 he applied himſelf to the Study of Phyſic; and after gaining all the Inſight into it he could; by reading the uſual preparatory Books, and attending the beſt Lectures during that and the following Winter in *London*; in Order to improve himſelf ſtill more, in *January* 1718-19 he went to *Paris*. There he lodged *au Cloître St. Benoit, Rue des Mathurins*, in the ſame Houſe with Mr. WINSLOW, the famous Anatomiſt, whoſe Lectures he attended, as he did thoſe of the *Materia Medica*, *Chemiſtry*, and *Botany*, at the *King's Gardens*. The Operations of *Surgery* he ſaw at the *Hôtel Dieu*, and attended alſo for ſome Time M. GREGOIRE, the *Accoucheur*, but without any Deſign of ever practiſing that or any other Branch of *Surgery*. Here he became acquainted

quainted with ALBINUS, afterwards Professor at *Leyden*, Father MONTFAUCON, and several other Persons of Note. Here too was his first Knowledge of Mr. MARTIN BENSON, afterwards Bishop of *Gloucester*, one of the most agreeable and virtuous Men of his Time, with whom he quickly became much connected, and not many Years after was united to him by the strongest Bonds of Affinity, as well as Affection.

During the Whole of Mr. SECKER's Continuance at *Paris*, he kept up a constant Correspondence with Mr. BUTLER, who before this Time had taken Orders, and on the Recommendation of Dr. CLARKE, and Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, Son to Bishop TALBOT, was appointed by Sir JOSEPH JEKYLL, Preacher at the Rolls. Mr. BUTLER took Occasion to mention his Friend Mr. SECKER, without his Knowledge, to Mr. TALBOT; who promised, in Case he chose to take Orders in the Church of *England*, to engage the Bishop his Father to provide for him. This was communicated to Mr. SECKER in a Letter from Mr. BUTLER, about the Beginning of *May*, 1720. He had not at that Time come to any Resolution of quitting the

Study of Physic; but he began to foresee many Obstacles to his pursuing that Profession; and having never discontinued his Application to Theology, his former Difficulties, both with Regard to Conformity and some other doubtful Points, had gradually lessened, as his Judgement became stronger, and his Reading and Knowledge more extensive. It appears also from two of his Letters still in Being, written from *Paris* to a Friend in *England*, (both of them prior to the Date of Mr. BUTLER's abovementioned) that he was greatly dissatisfied with the Divisions and Disturbances which at that particular Period prevailed amongst the Dissenters. In this State of Mind Mr. BUTLER's unexpected Proposal found him, which he was therefore very well disposed to take into Consideration; and after deliberating carefully on the Subject of such a Change for upwards of two Months, he resolved at length to embrace the Offer, and for that Purpose quitted *France* the latter End of *July*, or Beginning of *August*, 1720.

On his Arrival in *England* he was introduced to Mr. TALBOT, with whom he cultivated a close Acquaintance. But it was unfortunately of very short Duration. For in

the Month of *December* that Gentleman caught the Small-Pox, and died. This was a great Shock to all his Friends, who had justly conceived the highest Expectations of him, but especially to an amiable Lady whom he had lately married, and who was very near sinking under so sudden and grievous a Stroke. Mr. SECKER, besides sharing largely in the common Grief, had peculiar Reason to lament an Accident that seemed to put an End at once to all his Hopes; but he had taken his Resolution, and he determined to persevere. It was some Encouragement to him to find that Mr. TALBOT had on his Death-bed recommended him, together with Mr. BENSON and Mr. BUTLER, to his Father's Notice. Thus did that excellent young Man, (for he was but Twenty-nine when he died) by his nice Discernment of Characters, and his considerate Good-nature, provide most effectually in a few solemn Moments for the Welfare of that Church from which he himself was so prematurely snatched away; and at the same Time raised up (when he least thought of it) the truest Friend and Protector to his Wife and unborn Daughter; who afterwards found in Mr. SECKER all that tender Care and

Aſſiſtance which they could have hoped for from the neareſt Relation.

It being judged neceſſary by Mr. SECKER's Friends that he ſhould have a Degree at *Oxford*; and he having been informed that if he ſhould previouſly take the Degree of Doctor in Phyſic at *Leyden*, it would probably help him in obtaining the other, he went a little before *Chriſtmas* from *London* to *Rotterdam*, and thence to *Leyden*. He took his Degree there, *March* 7, 1720-1; and, as Part of his Exerciſe for it, compoſed and printed a Diſſertation *de Medicinâ Staticâ*, which is ſtill extant, and is thought, by the Gentlemen of that Profeſſion, a ſenſible and learned Performance. GORTER, in his Treatiſe *de perſpiratione inſenſibili*, printed at *Leyden* in the Year 1736, makes a ſhort but reſpectful Mention of it in his Preface. After paying a Viſit to *Amſterdam* he returned by the Way of *Helvoetſluys* and *Harwich* to *London*, and on the 1ſt of *April*, 1721, entered himſelf a Gentleman-Commoner of *Exeter College* in *Oxford*; about a Twelvemonth after which he obtained the Degree of *Batchelor of Arts* in that *Univerſity*, without any Difficulty; in Conſequence of the Chancellor's* recommendatory Letter to the Convocation.

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He now ſpent a conſiderable Part of his Time in *London*, where he quickly gained the Eſteem of ſome of the moſt learned and ingenious Men of thoſe Days, particularly of Dr. CLARKE, Rector of *St. James's*, and the celebrated Dean BERKELEY, afterwards Biſhop of *Cloyne*, with whom he every Day became more delighted and more cloſely connected. He paid frequent Viſits of Gratitude and Friendſhip to Mrs. TALBOT, Widow of Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, by whom ſhe had a Daughter five Months after his Deceaſe. With her lived Mrs. CATHARINE BENSON, Siſter to Biſhop BENSON, whom in many Reſpects ſhe greatly reſembled. She had been for ſeveral Years Mrs. TALBOT's inſeparable Companion, and was of unſpeakable Service to her at the Time of her Huſband's Death, by exerting all her Courage, Activity, and good Senſe, (of which ſhe poſſeſſed a large Share) to ſupport her Friend under ſo great an Affliction; and by afterwards attending her ſickly Infant with the utmoſt Care and Tenderneſs, to which, under Providence, was owing the Preſervation of a very valuable Life.

Biſhop TALBOT being in *November* 1721 appointed to the See of *Durham*, Mr. SECKER was in *December* 1722 ordained Deacon by him

him in *St. James*'s Church, and Priest not long after in the same Place, where he preached his first Sermon, *March* 28, 1723. The Bishop's domestic Chaplain at that Time was Dr. RUNDLE, a Man of warm Fancy, and very brilliant Conversation, but apt sometimes to be carried by the Vivacity of his Wit into indiscreet and ludicrous Expressions, which created him Enemies, and on one Occasion produced disagreeable Consequences. With him Mr. SECKER was soon after associated in the Bishop's Family, and both taken down by his Lordship to *Durham* in *July* 1723.

On the Death of Sir GEORGE WHELER, in 1723-4, the Bishop gave his Prebend of *Durham* to Mr. BENSON, and the Rectory of *Houghton le Spring* to Mr. SECKER. This valuable Piece of Preferment putting it in his Power to fix himself in the World in a Manner agreeable to his Inclinations, he soon after made a Proposal of Marriage to Mrs. BENSON abovementioned; which being accepted they were married by Bishop TALBOT in *King-Street* Chapel, *October* 28, 1725. At the earnest Desire of both, Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter consented to live with them, and the two Families from that Time became one.

Not

Not long before this, Bishop TALBOT had given the Rectory of *Haughton* near *Darlington*, to Mr. BUTLER. There was a Necessity for rebuilding a great Part of the Parsonage-House, and Mr. BUTLER had neither Money nor Talents for that Work. Mr. SECKER therefore, who had his Friends always in his Thoughts, and was now in great Favour with his Patron, persuaded him to give Mr. BUTLER, in Exchange for *Haughton*, the Rectory of *Stanhope*, which was of much greater Value, and without any such Incumbrance. In the Winter of 1725-6 Mr. BUTLER published the first Edition of his incomparable Sermons. Mr. SECKER took much Pains to render his Stile more familiar, and his Meaning more obvious. Yet they were at last by many called obscure. But whatever requires Attention is not of Course obscure. No one (as Dr. CLARKE rightly observed on this Occasion) ever imputed Obscurity to *Euclid's Elements*. Difficulties they may have, but Difficulties soon mastered by the Degree of Attention which such Subjects require.—Mr. SECKER gave his Friend the same Assistance in the Discourse prefixed to the *Second Edition*, and also in that noble Work, which he afterwards published, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural*

and

and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.

He now gave up all the Time he possibly could to his Residence at *Houghton*. He applied himself with Alacrity to all the Duties of a Country Clergyman, and supported that useful and respectable Character throughout with the strictest Propriety. He omitted Nothing which he thought could be of Use to the Souls and Bodies of the People entrusted to his Care. He brought down his Conversation and his Sermons to the Level of their Understandings; he visited them in private, he catechised the young and ignorant, he received his Country Neighbours and Tenants kindly and hospitably, and was of great Service to the poorer Sort of them by his Skill in Physic, which was the only Use he ever made of it. Though this Place was in a very remote Part of the World, yet the Solitude of it perfectly suited his studious Disposition, and the Income arising from it bounded his Ambition. Here he would have been content to live and die; here, as he has often been heard to declare, he spent some of the happiest Hours of his Life; and it was no Thought or Choice of his own that removed him to a higher and more public Sphere. But Mrs.

SECKER's Health, which began now to be very bad, and was thought to have been injured by the Dampneſs of the Situation, obliged him to think of exchanging it for a more healthy one. And Dr. FINNEY, Prebendary of *Durham*, and Rector of *Ryton*, being old and infirm, Mr. BENSON requeſted the Biſhop, through Dr. RUNDLE, that Mr. SECKER might ſucceed him, and reſign *Houghton*. This meeting with Difficulties, Mr. BENSON, in order to remove them, very generouſly gave up his Prebend of *Sarum*, to accommodate the Perſon for whom *Ryton* was deſigned, and then Mr. SECKER was allowed to make the Exchange abovementioned. He went up to *London*, and was inſtituted to *Ryton* and the Prebend, *June* 3, 1727, and for the two following Years lived chiefly at *Durham*, going over every Week to officiate at *Ryton*, and ſpending there two or three Months together in the Summer.

In *July* 1732, the Duke of *Grafton*, then Lord Chamberlain, appointed him Chaplain to the King. For this Favour he was indebted to Dr. SHERLOCK, who having heard him preach at *Bath*, had conceived the higheſt Opinion of his Abilities, and thought them well worthy of being brought forwards into

public Notice. From that Time an Intimacy commenced betwixt them, and he received from that great Prelate many solid Proofs of Esteem and Friendship.

His Month of Waiting at *St. James's* happened to be *August*, and on *Sunday* the 27th of that Month he preached before the Queen, the King being then abroad. A few Days after, her Majesty sent for him into her Closet, and held a long and gracious Conversation with him. In the Course of it he took an Opportunity of mentioning to her his Friend Mr. BUTLER. The Queen said, she thought he had been dead. Mr. SECKER assured her he was not. Yet her Majesty afterwards asked Archbishop BLACKBURNE if he was not dead? His Answer was; No, Madam, but he is buried. And indeed the Retirement of *Stanhope*, where he spent almost his whole Time, was too solitary for his Disposition, which had in it a natural Cast of Gloominess. And though these recluse Hours were by no Means lost either to private Improvement or public Utility, yet he felt at Times, very painfully, the Want of that select Society of Friends, to which he had been accustomed, and which could inspire him with the greatest Chearfulness. Mr. SECKER, who knew this,

was

was extremely anxious to draw him out into a more active and conspicuous Scene, and omitted no Opportunity of expressing this Desire to such as he thought capable of promoting it. And not long after this, on Mr. TALBOT's being made Lord Chancellor, he found Means to have Mr. BUTLER recommended to him for his Chaplain. His Lordship accepted and sent for him. This Promotion bringing him back into the World, the Queen very soon appointed him her *Clerk of the Closet*, from whence he rose, as his Talents became more known, to those high Dignities which he afterwards enjoyed.

Mr. SECKER now began to have a public Character, and stood high in the Estimation of those who were allowed to be the best Judges of Merit. He had already given Proofs of Abilities that plainly indicated the Eminence to which he must one Day rise, as a Preacher and a Divine; and it was not long before an Opportunity offered of placing him in an advantageous Point of View. Dr. TYRWHIT, who succeeded Dr. CLARKE as Rector of *St. James's* in 1729, found that preaching in so large a Church endangered his Health. Bishop GIBSON therefore, his Father-in-law, proposed to the Crown that he should be made

Residen-

Refidentiary of *St. Paul's*, and that Mr. SECKER fhould fucceed him in the Rectory. This Arrangement was fo acceptable to thofe in Power, that it took Place without any Difficulty. Mr. SECKER was inftituted Rector the 18th of *May*, 1733, and in the Beginning of *July* went to *Oxford* to take his Degree of *Doctor of Laws*, not being of fufficient Standing for that of *Divinity*. On this Occafion it was that he preached his celebrated *Act Sermon* on the Advantages and the Duties of academical Education, which was univerfally allowed to be a Mafterpiece of found Reafoning and juft Compofition. It was printed at the Defire of the Heads of Houfes, and quickly paffed through feveral Editions. It is now to be found in the Second Collection of his *Occafional Sermons*, publifhed by himfelf in 1766.

He was cenfured in a Paper called *The Weekly Mifcellany* for not quoting Texts of Scripture in this Sermon. The only Notice he took of that Cenfure was by contributing very liberally for many Years towards fupporting the Author of it.

At his next Waiting, at *Hampton-Court*, the Queen again fent for him, and faid very oblig-

ing

ing Things to him of this Sermon. And it was thought that the Reputation he had acquired by it contributed not a little towards that Promotion which very ſoon followed its Publication. For in *December* 1734 he received a very unexpected Notice, by Letter, from Biſhop GIBSON, that the King had fixed on him to be Biſhop of *Briſtol*. Dr. RUNDLE had a little before this been propoſed by the Lord Chancellor TALBOT for the See of *Glouceſter*, but on Account of ſome Imprudences of Speech charged on the Doctor by Mr. VENN, the Biſhop of *London* oppoſed this Nomination, and with much Difficulty prevailed on Dr. BENSON to accept that Dignity. Dr. FLEMING was about the ſame Time promoted to the See of *Carliſle*; and the three new Biſhops were all conſecrated together in *Lambeth Chapel*, *Jan.* 19, 1734-5, the Conſecration Sermon being preached by Dr. THOMAS, late Biſhop of *Wincheſter*.

The Honours to which Dr. SECKER was thus raiſed in the Prime of Life did not in the leaſt abate his Diligence and Attention to Buſineſs; for which indeed there was now more Occaſion than ever. He immediately ſet about the Viſitation of his Dioceſe, confirmed in a

great Number of Places, preached in ſeveral Churches, ſometimes twice a Day, and, from the Informations received in his Progreſs, laid the Foundation of a parochial Account of his Dioceſe, for the Benefit of his Succeſſors. Finding, at the ſame Time, the Affairs of his Pariſh of *St. James's* in great Diſorder, he took the Trouble, in Concert with a few others, to put the Accounts of the ſeveral Officers into a regular Method, drew up a Set of excellent Rules to direct them better for the future, and, by the large Share which he always took in the Management of the Poor, and the Regulation of many other parochial Concerns, was of ſignal Service to his Pariſhioners, even in a temporal View. But it was their ſpiritual Welfare which engaged, as it ought to do, his chief Attention. As far as the Circumſtances of the Times and the Populouſneſs of that polite Part of the Metropolis allowed, he omitted not even thoſe private Admonitions and perſonal Applications which are often attended with the happieſt Effects. Not being able, however, to do ſo much in this Way as he wiſhed, he was peculiarly aſſiduous in giving and promoting every Kind of public Inſtruction. He allowed out of his own

own Income a Salary for reading early and late Prayers, which had formerly been paid out of the Offertory Money. He held a *Confirmation* once every Year, and examined and inſtructed the Candidates ſeveral Weeks before in the Veſtry, and gave them religious Tracts, which he alſo diſtributed, at other Times, very liberally to thoſe that needed them. He drew up for the Uſe of his Pariſhioners that admirable Courſe of *Lectures on the Church Catechiſm*, which have been lately publiſhed, and not only read them, once every Week on the uſual Days, but alſo every Sunday Evening, either at the Church or one of the Chapels belonging to it. They were received with univerſal Approbation, and attended regularly by Perſons of all Ages and Conditions. The Judgement of the Public has ſince confirmed the Opinion of his Pariſhioners, and eſtabliſhed the Reputation of this Work, as one of the fulleſt, cleareſt, and exacteſt Compendiums of revealed Religion that the Engliſh Language affords.

The Sermons which at the ſame Time he ſet himſelf to compoſe were truly excellent and original. His Faculties were now in their full Vigour, and he had an Audience to ſpeak

before that rendered the utmoſt Exertion of them neceſſary. He did not however ſeek to gratify the higher Part by amuſing them with refined Speculations or ingenious Eſſays, unintelligible to the lower Part, and unprofitable to both; but he laid before them all, with equal Freedom and Plainneſs, the great Chriſtian Duties belonging to their reſpective Stations, and reproved the Follies and Vices of every Rank amongſt them without Diſtinction or Palliation. He ſtudied human Nature thoroughly in all its various Forms, and knew what Sort of Arguments would have moſt Weight with each Claſs of Men. He brought the Subject home to their Boſoms, and did not ſeem to be merely ſaying uſeful Things in their Preſence, but addreſſing himſelf perſonally to every one of them. Few ever poſſeſſed, in a higher Degree, the rare Talent of touching on the moſt delicate Subjects with the niceſt Propriety and Decorum, of ſaying the moſt familiar Things without being low, the plaineſt without being feeble, the boldeſt without giving Offence. He could deſcend with ſuch ſingular Eaſe and Felicity into the minuteſt Concerns of common Life, could lay open, with ſo much Addreſs, the various

Workings,

Workings, Artifices, and Evaſions of the human Mind; that his Audience often thought their own particular Caſes alluded to, and heard with Surprize their private Sentiments and Feelings, their Ways of reaſoning and Principles of acting, exactly ſtated and deſcribed. His Preaching was, at the ſame Time, highly rational, and truly evangelical. He explained with Perſpicuity, he aſſerted with Dignity, the peculiar characteriſtic Doctrines of the Goſpel. He inculcated the Utility, the Neceſſity of them, not merely as ſpeculative Truths, but as actual Inſtruments of moral Goodneſs, tending to purify the Hearts, and regulate the Lives of Men; and thus, by God's gracious Appointment, as well as by the inſeparable Connection betwixt true Faith and right Practice, leading them to Salvation.

Theſe important Truths he taught with the Authority, the Tenderneſs, the Familiarity, of a Parent inſtructing his Children. Though he neither poſſeſſed nor affected the artificial Eloquence of an Orator who wants only to amuſe or to miſlead, yet he had that of an honeſt Man who wants to convince, of a Chriſtian Preacher who wants to reform and to ſave, thoſe that hear him. Solid

Argument, manly Sense, useful Directions, short, nervous, striking Sentences, awakening Questions, frequent and pertinent Applications of Scripture; all these following each other in quick Succession, and coming evidently from the Speaker's Heart; enforced by his Elocution, his Figure, his Action, and above all by the corresponding Sanctity of his Example, stamped Conviction on the Minds of his Hearers, and sent them Home with Impressions not easy to be effaced. It will readily be imagined that with these Powers he quickly became one of the most admired and popular Preachers of his Time. And though it is not to be expected that his Sermons will now afford the same Pleasure, or produce the same Effects, in the Closet, that they did from the Pulpit, accompanied as they then were with all the Advantages of his Delivery; yet it will plainly appear, that the Applause they met with was founded no less on the Matter they contained, than the Manner in which they were spoken.

On the Death of Archbishop WAKE, Dr. POTTER was appointed to succeed him in the See of *Canterbury*, and that of *Oxford* was offered to Dr. SECKER, who at first declined it. But at the earnest Request of Bishop SHERLOCK,

SHERLOCK, who was desirous to obtain the Bishopric of *Bristol* for his Brother-in-law Dr. GOOCH, he was at Length prevailed on to accept the Proposal, and was confirmed Bishop of *Oxford* in the Month of *May* 1737. Towards the End of the same Year died Queen CAROLINE, and the *Sunday* following Bishop SECKER preached a Sermon on that Occasion, at *St. James's* Church, which the Princesses desired to see, and showed it to the King, who read it. It was afterwards published in the Second Volume of his *Occasional Sermons*, which appeared in his Life-time.

When the unfortunate Breach happened betwixt the late King and the Prince of *Wales*, his Royal Highness having removed to *Norfolk-House*, which is in the Parish of *St. James's*, attended Divine Service constantly in that Church. The first Time he came there, the Clerk in Orders, Mr. BONNEY, inadvertently begun Prayers with his usual Sentence of Scripture, *I will arise and go to my Father*, &c. This quickly became the Subject of much Conversation; and an Addition was made to it, that the Rector preached on the Fifth Commandment, *Honour thy Father and thy Mother*, &c. which was so positively asserted, that Bishop SHERLOCK could only

defend him, by saying that he must certainly have been in a Course of Sermons on the Commandments, and therefore could not help preaching upon that particular one in its Turn. But the Truth was, he preached on a quite different Text, *The Lord is good to all*, &c. and the whole Sermon was on that Subject. The Prince was pleased to shew his Lordship several Marks of Civility and Condescension. He had the Honour of baptizing all his Highness's Children, except two; and though he did not attend his Court, which was forbidden to all those who went to the King's, yet on every proper Occasion he behaved with all the Submission and Respect due to his illustrious Rank. In Consequence of this, his Influence with the Prince being supposed much greater than it really was, he was sent, by the King's Direction, with a Message to his Royal Highness; which not producing the Effects expected from it, he had the Misfortune to incur his Majesty's Displeasure; who had been unhappily persuaded to think that he might have done more with the Prince than he did, though indeed he could not.—For this Reason, and because he sometimes acted with those who opposed the Court, the King did not speak to him for a great Number of Years.

In *February* 1742-3 a Bill was brought into Parliament to take off the high Duties on ſpirituous Liquors, and to lay on others much lower in their Room. As this Alteration was thought likely to have a moſt pernicious Effect on the Health and Morals of the common People, it met with a vigorous Oppoſition in the Houſe of Lords, eſpecially from the Bench of Biſhops, all of whom voted, and ſeveral ſpoke, againſt it. Amongſt the latter were Biſhop SHERLOCK and Biſhop SECKER: And when it paſſed, the Biſhop of *Oxford* entered his Diſſent. Mr. SANDYS was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and this was conſidered as his Bill; yet ſoon after, on the Death of Biſhop HOUGH, he very generouſly endeavoured, without Dr. SECKER's Knowledge, to obtain for him the See of *Worceſter*. It was in the Courſe of the ſame Year that his Lordſhip received a Letter from Dr. WISHART, Provoſt of *Edinburgh* College, recommending to him his Brother and Mr. WALLACE, Deputies from the eſtabliſhed Clergy of *Scotland*, to promote a Bill in Parliament for providing a Maintenance for their Widows and Children, which many of them imagined the Biſhops would oppoſe. Dr. SECKER paid them all the Civility, and did

them

them all the Service he could. None of the Bench opposed their Bill either publicly or privately, and it was moved for by a Bishop at each of its three Readings in the House of Lords.

About the Middle of *October*, in the following Year, died SARAH, Duchess Dowager of *Marlborough*. She was buried at *Blenheim*, by Bishop SECKER, whom she had appointed one of her Executors. For this Choice she could have no other Reason than the high Opinion she entertained in common with the rest of the World, of his Understanding and Integrity; for he never paid the least Court to her, either by private Adulation, or by accommodating his public Conduct to her Grace's political Sentiments. On his being made Bishop of OXFORD, she paid him some common Civilities of Neighbourhood, and desired, by Lord CORNBURY, to see him. When he had visited her a few Times, she requested him to be one of her Executors, and read to him the Clause in her Will relating to them, in which she had given each of them £2000, and indemnified them from any Mistakes which they might honestly make. Before he gave his Consent, he consulted Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE upon it, who ad-

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viſed him to accept the Truſt. After this he viſited her Grace occaſionally every Winter. She never aſked him any Queſtions, nor gave him any Hints, about the paſt or future Diſpoſal of his Vote in Parliament. He always ſpoke his Mind to her very freely, how much ſoever it differed from hers, and ſhe bore it, for the moſt Part, patiently. He blamed her for leaving ſo much of her Eſtate to Perſons not related to her, and particularly for giving any Thing to himſelf, who, he told her, was as rich as her Grace. Theſe Remonſtrances ſhe did not ſeem to take well, and never ſaid any Thing more to him about her Will. He therefore concluded that ſhe had ſtruck him out from being one of her Executors, but it proved otherwiſe. She gave each of them an additional £.500. None of her Money ever came into his Lordſhip's Hands to be diſpoſed of by him in her Life-time. But he had good Reaſon to think that ſhe gave away large Sums in Charity, to the amount of ſeveral Thouſands every Year.

Some Time before this, the Nation began to be alarmed with the Appearances of a Rebellion.* About the middle of *February*, 1743-4, the King ſent a Meſſage to both Houſes of Parliament, acquainting them, that

the Pretender's Son was meditating an Invasion of this Kingdom from the Coast of *France*. The Bishop of OXFORD took the earliest Opportunity, after this Declaration, of signalizing his Affection to the Government, and exciting that of others, by composing a Sermon on the Occasion, which he preached at *St. James's* Church the 26th of the same Month. A Motion was soon after made in the House of Lords to attaint the Pretender's Son. It met with some Opposition, but was strenuously supported by the Friends of the Constitution, and amongst others by Bishop SECKER, who made a spirited extempore Speech in its Favour. When the Rebellion actually broke out in *September*, 1745, he sent immediately a circular Letter upon it to his Clergy, and drew up and promoted an Address from them to the King. On his Return to *London* in *October*, he preached the abovementioned Sermon again at his Church and both his Chapels, with some Alterations and Improvements, and leaving it to be printed, went down to a County Meeting at *Oxford*, and back again in a few Days to *St. James's*, when he presented his Sermon to the King. It was much read and admired, and has been ranked, by

the best Judges, amongst the First of the many excellent Ones which were published on that Occasion *.

In the Spring of the Year 1748, Mrs. SECKER died of the Gout in her Stomach. She was a Woman of great Sense and Merit, but of a very weak and sickly Constitution. They had been married upwards of twenty Years, during the greatest Part of which Time, her extreme bad State of Health and Spirits had put his Affection to the severest Trials; by which, instead of being lessened, it seemed to become stronger every Day. He attended her in all her long Illnesses with the greatest Care and Tenderness, and was always ready to break off any Engagement, any Study, provided his Company could procure her a Moment's Ease or Chearfulness.

Not long after this a Bill came into the House of Lords, and afterwards passed into an Act, by which all Letters of Orders to *Scotch* Episcopal Ministers, not granted by a Bishop of the Church of *England* or *Ireland*, were disallowed from *Michaelmas*, 1748, whether dated before that Time or after. This the Bishop of *Oxford* thought a great Hard-

* It is now in the Volume of Sermons printed by himself when Bishop of Oxford, in 1758.

ſhip, and ſpoke largely againſt it in the Houſe. He was anſwered, but with much Civility and Reſpect, by Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE, who favoured the Bill. In the Committee however the Majority were againſt it, of which all the Biſhops preſent made Part. Biſhop THOMAS, of *Lincoln*, alſo ſpoke againſt it upon the Report. But there they were outvoted. Dr. WISHART, the Provoſt of *Edinburgh* College, told his Lordſhip afterwards, that he thought the Bill was too hard on the Epiſcopal Miniſters, and that the Biſhops had done right.

The Part which Dr. SECKER took in this Affair did him not the leaſt Diſſervice with his Friend the Lord Chancellor, whoſe Sentiments he oppoſed; and who a little before had made a Propoſal to him, that if the Deanery of *St. Paul*'s became vacant, he ſhould take it in Exchange for the Rectory of *St. James*'s, and the Prebend of *Durham*. The Biſhop accepted the Offer; but told his Lordſhip he ſhould not remind him of it, which he never did. Notwithſtanding that, about two Years afterwards, on the Nomination of Dr. BUTLER, Dean of *St. Paul*'s, to the See of *Durham*, Lord HARDWICKE immediately wrote to the Duke of *Newcaſtle*, who was then at

Hanover

Hanover with the King, recommending the Bishop of *Oxford* for the Deanery. His Majesty consented, and he was installed in *December*, 1750.

It was no Wonder that after presiding over so extensive and populous a Parish for upwards of Seventeen Years, Bishop SECKER should willingly consent to be released from a Burthen, which began now to grow too great for his Strength. Some of his Parishioners too had requited him but ill for the Pains he sincerely took to serve them in all Respects. But far the largest and most creditable Part of them were duly sensible of what they owed to him; and most deeply regretted the Loss of a Pastor, whose Character they reverenced, and by whose Labours and Instructions they had so greatly profited. When he preached his Farewell Sermon, the whole Audience melted into Tears. He was followed with the Prayers and good Wishes of those whom every honest Man would be most ambitious to please; and there are Numbers still living, who retain a strong and grateful Remembrance of his incessant and tender Solicitude for their Welfare.

Having now more Leisure both to prosecute his own Studies, and to encourage those of

others,

others, he gave Dr. CHURCH considerable Assistance, in his *first and second Vindication of the miraculous Powers*, &c. against Dr. MIDDLETON, which were published in the Years 1750 and 1751; and he was of equal Use to him in his *Analysis of Lord* BOLINGBROKE'*s Works*, which appeared a few Years afterwards. About the same Time began the late Archdeacon SHARP's Controversy with the Followers of Mr. HUTCHINSON, which was carried on to the End of the Year 1755. The Subjects of it were, the Meaning of the Words *Elohim* and *Berith*, the Antiquity of the *Hebrew* Language and Character, the Exposition of the Word *Cherubim*. These Pieces made together three Volumes in Octavo. Bishop SECKER read over all Dr. SHARP's Papers before they went to the Press, and corrected and improved them throughout.

But the Ease which this late Change of Situation gave him was very soon disturbed by a heavy and unexpected Stroke, the Loss of his three Friends, Bishops BUTLER, BENSON, and BERKELEY, who were all cut off within the Space of one Year. Of these eminent Men who were thus joined in Death, as they had been throughout Life, and with whom Bishop SECKER was most intimately connected from his

his earliest Years, two are so well known to the World by their immortal Writings, and the just Applause of contemporary Authors, that they need no other Memorial. But the Name of BENSON, being written only on the Hearts of those that knew him, deserves some further Notice in this Place.

* He was educated at the *Charter-house*, and removed from thence to *Christ Church* in *Oxford*, where he had several noble Pupils, whose Friendship and Veneration for him continued to the End of Life. His favourite Study in early Years was the *Mathematics*, in which he was well skilled, and had also an excellent Taste for *Painting*, *Architecture*, and the other fine Arts. He accompanied the late Earl of POMFRET in his Travels, and in *Italy* became acquainted with Mr. BERKELEY, as he did at *Paris* with Mr. SECKER. He was, from his Youth to his latest Age, the Delight of all who knew him. His Manner and Behaviour were the Result of great natural Humanity, polished by a thorough Knowledge of the World, and the most perfect good Breeding, mixed with a Dignity, which, on Occasions that called for it, no one

* This Account of Bishop BENSON is given in the Words of a Person who knew him well, and to whom this Narrative is indebted for a few other Communications of the same Nature.

more properly ſupported. His Piety, though awefully ſtrict, was inexpreſſibly amiable. It diffuſed ſuch a Sweetneſs through his Temper, and ſuch a Benevolence over his Countenance, as none who were acquainted with him can ever forget. Bad Nerves, bad Health, and naturally bad Spirits were ſo totally ſubdued by it, that he not only ſeemed, but in Reality was, the happieſt of Men. He looked upon all that the World calls important, its Pleaſures, its Riches, its various Competitions, with a playful and good-humoured Kind of Contempt; and could make Perſons aſhamed of their Follies, by a Raillery that never gave Pain to any human Being. Of Vice he always ſpoke with Severity and Deteſtation, but looked on the vicious with the Tenderneſs of a pitying Angel. His Turn was highly ſociable, and his Acquaintance very extenſive. Wherever he went, he carried Chearfulneſs and Improvement along with him. As Nothing but the Intereſts of Chriſtianity and Virtue ſeemed conſiderable enough to give him any laſting Anxiety; ſo, on the other Hand, there was no Incident ſo trifling from which he could not raiſe Amuſement and Mirth.

It was much againſt his Will that he was appointed Biſhop of *Glouceſter*, and from that

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See he would never remove. He was however a vigilant and active Prelate. He revived the very useful Institution of rural Deans, he augmented several Livings, he beautified the Church, and greatly improved the Palace. It was an Act of Kindness to his Friend which cost him his Life. At the Request of Dr. SECKER he went from *Gloucester* to *Bath* to visit Bishop BUTLER, who lay ill at that Place, and he found him almost at the Point of Death. After one Day's Stay there, he was obliged to go to the northern Extremity of his Diocese, to confirm. The Fatigue of these Journies, (for, according to his constant Practice, he travelled on Horseback) and his Business together, produced an Inflammation, and that a Mortification, in his Bowels, of which he died. The Bishop of *Oxford* was appointed one of his Executors, with a Legacy of £.300. which he refused to take.

In the Beginning of the Year 1753, a Bill for the Naturalization of the *Jews*, commonly called the *Jew Bill*, had passed both Houses of Parliament with little or no Opposition. But a great Clamour being raised against it without Doors, it was thought adviseable that

the Duke of *Newcastle* should move for the Repeal of it, on the first Day of the Session in the next Winter. And he desiring to be seconded by a Bishop, Dr. SECKER was fixed on for that Purpose. He accordingly rose up after the Duke, and made a Speech, which had the good Fortune to be remarkably well received; though Lord *Westmoreland* said, that for some Time he thought the Bishop had been speaking against the Repeal, having advanced more in Favour of the Bill than he had ever heard before. He spoke afterwards for a Clause to disable *Jews* from being Patrons of Livings, which some thought they might; but the Desire of the House for the simple Repeal prevailed, and he was advised not to divide it on the Clause. On this Occasion it was that he vindicated his Friend Dr. SHERLOCK, with great Spirit, against some severe Attacks made upon him by a noble Lord in Relation to this Bill; for which generous Proceeding he had the Bishop's Thanks.

During the whole Time that he was Dean of *St. Paul*'s, he attended Divine Service constantly in that Cathedral twice every Day, whether in Residence or not; and, in Concert with the other three Residentiaries, established the Cus-

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tom of always preaching their own Turns in the Afternoon, or exchanging with each other only; which, excepting the Case of Illness, or extraordinary Accidents, was very punctually observed. The Fund, appropriated to the Repairs of the Church, having by Neglect and wrong Management fallen into much Confusion, he took great Pains in examining the Accounts, reducing Payments, making a proper Division of Expence betwixt the Dean and Chapter on one Side, and the three Trustees on the other, and prevailing on the latter to agree to that Division; by which Means the Fund was put on such a Footing, that it encreased afterwards considerably, and promised to be sufficient for the Purposes it was designed to answer. In the following Year he was engaged in another very troublesome Transaction, making an Agreement with the Inhabitants of *St. Faith's* Parish, concerning their Share of *St. Paul's* Church-yard. And he left behind him a great Number of Papers relative to both these Points. He procured the old Writings of the Church to be put in Order, and an Index made to them. He collated a Copy of the old Statute-Boook, as it is called, with that which is used as the Original, and corrected a Multitude of Mistakes in that

Transcript. He examined also the Registers and Books in the Chapter-House, extracted out of them what seemed material, and left the Extracts in the Hands of his Successor.

In the Summer Months he resided constantly at his Episcopal House at *Cuddesden*. The Vicinity of that Place to the University of *Oxford*, and the natural Connection which his Station gave him with the Members of that learned Body, could not but be very pleasing to a Man of his literary Turn. Yet his Situation, agreeable and honourable as it was to him, had notwithstanding its Difficulties. To appear with any considerable Degree of Credit amongst so many Men of the first Eminence for Genius and Erudition, and to preserve the Reverence due to the Character of a Diocesan, amidst such violent Party-dissensions as at that Time unhappily prevailed there, required no small Share of Ability and Prudence. Dr. SECKER however had the good Fortune to succeed in both those Points. His House was the Resort of those who were most distinguished for academical Merit, and his Conversation such as was worthy of his Guests, who always left him with a high Esteem of his Understanding and Learning. And though in the warm Contest in 1754,

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for Representatives of the County, (in which it was scarce possible for any Person of Eminence to remain neuter) he openly espoused that Side which was thought most favourable to the Principles of the Revolution; yet it was without Bitterness or Vehemence, without ever departing from the Decency of his Profession, the Dignity of his Station, or the Charity prescribed by his Religion. On the contrary, along with the truest Affection to the Government, (though he was then under the Displeasure of the Court) he preserved at the same Time so much good Temper and good Will towards the opposite Party; took such unwearied Pains to soften the violent Prejudices conceived against them by the Administration; and shewed on all proper Occasions so cordial and friendly a Concern for the Welfare and Honour of the whole University; that they, who most disliked his political Tenets, could not help acknowledging his Candour and Moderation. The same prudent Conduct in this Respect which he observed himself, he recommended to his Clergy in that memorable Passage towards the Conclusion of his fifth Charge,* which struck the Hearers by its Novelty and Propriety at the Time in a very

* Page 197.

remarkable Manner, and is well worthy the ſerious Peruſal of all who happen to be in ſimilar Circumſtances. Indeed the whole Series of thoſe excellent Charges, which he delivered in the Courſe of his governing that Dioceſe, were liſtened to by a very learned and critical Audience with peculiar Marks of Attention and Regard. The firſt of them, which contains Directions for regulating the Studies, the Temper, and general Conduct of the Clergy, was printed ſoon after it was ſpoken, and paſſed through ſeveral Editions. Having in this conſidered them as Miniſters of the Goſpel at large, in his ſubſequent ones he proceeded to conſider them as Miniſters of the ſeveral Pariſhes in which they officiated; and deſcended to more particular Directions, both with Regard to the Diſcharge of their ſpiritual Functions, and alſo the Care of their Temporalities, their Incomes, Churches, Lands, and Houſes.

But Words were not the only Perſuaſives he made uſe of. He enjoined no Duty, he impoſed no Burthen on thoſe under his Juriſdiction, which he had not formerly undergone, or was not ſtill ready, as far as it became him, to undergo. He preached conſtantly in his Church at *Cuddeſden* every *Sun-*

day Morning, and read a Lecture on the Catechism in the Evening; (both which he continued to do in *Lambeth* Chapel after he became Archbishop;) and in every other Respect, within his own proper Department, was himself that devout, discreet, disinterested, laborious, conscientious Pastor, which he wished and exhorted every Clergyman in his Diocese to become.

A Conduct like this could not fail of attracting the Notice and Esteem of all those who wished well to the Cause of Learning and Religion, in whose Thoughts he had been long marked out for the highest Honours of his Profession. He continued notwithstanding in the See of *Oxford* upwards of twenty Years; going on that whole Time in the same even Course of Duty, and enjoying with the highest Relish those leisure Hours, which his Retirement at *Cuddesden* sometimes afforded him, for the Prosecution of his favourite Studies. At Length however his distinguished Merit prevailed over all the political Obstacles to his Advancement; and placed him, without any Effort or Application of his own, in that important Station which he had shewn himself so well qualified to adorn. For within a very

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few Days after the Death of Archbishop HUTTON, he received a Message from the Duke of *Newcastle*, acquainting him that his Grace had proposed him to the King for the vacant See of *Canterbury*. He returned the Duke a short Note of Thanks, expressing at the same Time his Wishes that his Majesty might fix on a properer Person. Soon after this his Grace desired an Interview with the Bishop, at which he informed his Lordship that the King had appointed him Archbishop. This Promotion accordingly took Place, and he was confirmed at *Bow-Church*, *April* 21, 1758.

In accepting this high and burthensome Station Dr. SECKER acted on that Principle which influenced him through Life; he sacrificed his own Ease and Comfort to Considerations of public Utility. Apart from this, the mere secular Advantages of Grandeur were Objects below his Ambition; were, as he knew and felt, but poor Compensations for the Anxiety and Difficulties attending them. His Idea of these Things was always the same with that which is expressed in his intended Speech to the Convocation of 1761; "Non "sunt, experto credite, non sunt tanti vel ho-"nores vel reditus amplissimi Ecclesiasticis "destinati, ut a quopiam enixè cupiantur. "Multum

"Multum habent ſolicitudinis, non parum "forſan invidiæ, veræ delectationis nihil, niſi "quoties occurrit, occurrit autem raro, inſig-"nis benefaciendi occaſio *." Theſe were not mere Words of Courſe; they were the genuine Sentiments of his Heart; his whole Conduct bore Teſtimony to the Sincerity with which he ſpoke. He had never once through his whole Life aſked Preferment for himſelf, nor ſhewn any unbecoming Eagerneſs for it; and the Uſe he made of his newly acquired Dignity very clearly ſhewed, that Rank, and Wealth, and Power had in no other Light any Charms for him, than as they enlarged the Sphere of his active and induſtrious Benevolence.

The firſt Thing that engaged his Attention was the Care of his new Dioceſe, which he immediately viſited. And finding that partly the real, and partly the preſumed, Unwholeſomeneſs of ſome Parts of it had deterred too many from living on their Benefices, he made this the firſt Article of his Charge, and preſſed the Neceſſity of Reſidence upon his Clergy, in the ſtrongeſt, yet moſt affectionate Terms †.

* Oratio Synodalis, p. 368, 369.

† Firſt Charge to the Dioceſe of *Canterbury*, p. 207—219.

But

But whenever particular Circumstances rendered the personal Presence of the Minister himself clearly impracticable, he then earnestly recommended peculiar Care in the Choice of a Substitute; and so much Tenderness and Liberality in the Provision made for him as might be some Compensation for the Unhealthiness or Disagreeableness of his Situation.* Yet as this would, he knew, bear hard on some Incumbents, whose small Preferments, or narrow Circumstances, or numerous Families obliged them to obtain Help on as easy Terms as they well could; in such Cases he frequently made an Addition himself to the Curate's Salary, and as a still further Encouragement, rewarded occasionally with Preferment, those who had resided long upon their Cures, and performed their Duty well; especially in unwholesome Places.

In little more than two Years after his Grace's Promotion to the See of *Canterbury*, died the late King GEORGE the Second. Of what passed on that Occasion, and of the Form observed in proclaiming our present most gracious Sovereign, (in which the Archbishop

* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, p. 219—222.

biſhop of Courſe took the Lead) his Grace has left an Account in Writing. He did the ſame with regard to the ſubſequent Ceremonials of marrying and crowning their preſent Majeſties, which in Conſequence of his Station he had the Honour to ſolemnize, and in which he found a great Want of proper Precedents and Directions. He had before, when Rector of *St. James*'s, baptized the new King, (who was born in that Pariſh) and he was afterwards called upon to perform the ſame Office for the greateſt Part of his Majeſty's Children;—a remarkable, and perhaps unexampled, Concurrence of ſuch Incidents in the Life of one Man.

From the Time that he was made Dean of *St. Paul*'s, his late Majeſty uſed to ſpeak to him at his Levee occaſionally, but with no particular Marks of Diſtinction. But after he became Archbiſhop, the King treated him with much Kindneſs, and on one Occaſion was pleaſed to aſſure him very particularly, that he was perfectly ſatisfied with the Whole of his Conduct in that Station. And ſurely his Majeſty, as well as all his People, has good Reaſon to be ſo. For never did any one ſupport the Rank, or diſcharge the various Duties, of a Metropolitan, with more true Dignity, Wiſdom,

and

and Moderation, than Archbiſhop SECKER *. He conſidered himſelf as the natural Guardian, not only of that Church, over which he preſided, but of Learning, Virtue, and Religion at large; and, from the Eminence on which he was placed, looked round with a watchful Eye on every Thing that concerned them, embracing readily all fit Opportunities to promote their Intereſts, and oppoſing, as far as he was able, all Attempts to injure them.

Men of real Genius or extenſive Knowledge, he ſought out and encouraged. Even thoſe of humbler Talents, provided their Induſtry was great, and their Intentions good, he treated with Kindneſs and Condeſcenſion. Both Sorts he would frequently employ in Undertakings ſuited to their reſpective Abilities, and rewarded them in Ways ſuited to their reſpective Wants. He aſſiſted them with Books, promoted Sub-

* Ecquâ vero in parte ſpem noſtram fefellit? imo vero exſuperavit. Sine offenſione partium, ſine invidiâ, ſine ambitione, eccleſiæ principatum adeptus, ſine arrogantiâ cum dignitate verâ ſuſtinuit; magni vir animi, & verè αρχικος, qui politiam eccleſiaſticam animo complectebatur, conſilio dirigebat, auctoritate tuebatur, exemplo ornabat; in negotiis impiger & indefeſſus, nihil a ſe alienum putabat quod ad clericorum jura, mores, famamque pertinebat; auctoritate ita uſus ut nihil pro libidine aut inſolentiâ imperii affectaret, ſed omnia ad οικοδομην communeſque eccleſiæ utilitates referret. *Johannis Burton ad amicum epiſtola*, p. 14. Printed at *Oxford*, in 1768, and ſold by RIVINGTON.

ſcriptions

scriptions to their Works, contributed largely to them himself, talked with them on their private Concerns, entered warmly into their Interests, used his Credit for them with the Great, gave them Preferments of his own. He expended upwards of £.300, in arranging and improving the Manuscript Library at *Lambeth*. And having observed with Concern, that the Library of printed Books in that Palace had received no Accessions since the Time of Archbishop TENNISON, he made it his Business to collect Books in all Languages from most Parts of *Europe* at a very great Expence, with a View of supplying that Chasm; which he accordingly did, by leaving them to the Library at his Death, and thereby rendered that Collection one of the noblest and most useful in the Kingdom.

All Designs and Institutions that tended to advance good Morals and true Religion he patronized with Zeal and Generosity. He contributed largely to the Maintenance of Schools for the Poor, to rebuilding or repairing Parsonage Houses and Places of Worship, and gave at one Time no less than £.500 towards erecting a Chapel in the Parish of *Lambeth*, to which he afterwards added near £.100 more. To the Society for promoting Christian

tian Knowledge he was a liberal Benefactor; and to that for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, of which he was the President, he paid much Attention; was constant at all the Meetings of its Members, (even sometimes when his Health would but ill permit it) and superintended their Deliberations with consummate Prudence and Temper. He was sincerely desirous to improve to the utmost that excellent Institution, and to diffuse the Knowledge and Belief of Christianity as wide as the Revenues of the Society, and the extreme Difficulty of establishing Schools and Missions amongst the *Indians*, and of making any effectual and durable Impressions of Religion on their uncivilized Minds, would admit. But Dr. MAYHEW, of *Boston* in *New-England*, having in an angry Pamphlet accused the Society of not sufficiently answering these good Purposes, and of departing widely from the Spirit of their Charter; with many injurious Reflections interspersed on the Church of *England*, and the Design of appointing Bishops in *America*; his Grace on all these Accounts thought himself called upon to confute his Invectives, which he did in a short anonymous Piece, entitled, *An Answer to Dr.* MAYHEW's

Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for propagating the Gospel; printed for RIVINGTON in 1764, and reprinted in *America*. The Strength of Argument, as well as Fairness and good Temper, with which this Answer was written, had a considerable Effect on all impartial Men, and even on the Doctor himself, who plainly perceived that he had no common Adversary to deal with; and could not help acknowledging him to be "a Person "of excellent Sense, and a happy Talent at "writing; apparently free from the sordid "illiberal Spirit of Bigotry; one of a cool "Temper, who often shewed much Candour, "was well acquainted with the Affairs of the "Society, and in general a fair Reasoner *." He was therefore so far wrought upon by his "worthy Answerer †," as to abate much in his Reply of his former Warmth and Acrimony. But as he still would not allow himself to be "wrong in any material Point ‡," nor forbear giving Way too much to reproachful Language and ludicrous Representations, he was again animadverted upon by Mr. APTHORPE, in a sensible Tract, entitled, *A Review of Dr.*

* MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Tract, &c. P. 3.
† Ibid. P. 85. ‡ Ibid. P. 87.

MAYHEW's *Remarks*, &c. printed alſo for RIVINGTON, in 1765. This put an End to the Diſpute. The Doctor on reading it declared he ſhould not anſwer it, and the following Year he died.

It appeared evidently in the Courſe of this Controverſy, that Dr. MAYHEW, and probably many other worthy Men amongſt the *Diſſenters* both at home and abroad, had conceived very unreaſonable and groundleſs Jealouſies of the Church of *England*, and its Governors; and had in particular greatly miſunderſtood the Propoſal for appointing Biſhops in ſome of the Colonies. The chief Reaſons for deſiring an Eſtabliſhment of this Nature, were, the Want of Perſons veſted with proper Authority, to adminiſter to the Members of the Church of *England* the antient and uſeful Office of Confirmation; to ſuperintend the Conduct of the epiſcopal Clergy; and to ſave Candidates for the Miniſtry the Trouble, Coſt, and Hazard of coming to *England* for Ordination. It was alledged, that the Expence of croſſing the *Atlantic* for that Purpoſe could not be leſs than £.100. that near a fifth Part of thoſe who took that Voyage had actually loſt their Lives; and that, in Conſequence of

theſe

these Discouragements, one Half of the Churches in several Provinces were destitute of Clergymen. Common Humanity, as well as common Justice, pleaded strongly for a Remedy to these Evils; and there appeared to be no other effectual Remedy but the Appointment of one or more Bishops in some of the episcopal Colonies. The Dangers and Inconveniences, which the *Dissenters* seemed to apprehend from that Measure, were thought to be effectually guarded against by the Mode of Appointment which was proposed. What that Mode was, may be seen in the following Extract from the Archbishop's Answer to Dr. MAYHEW, in which he explains concisely and clearly the only Plan for such an Establishment that was ever meant to be carried into Execution.

"The Church of *England* is, in its Con-
" stitution, episcopal. It is, in some of the
" Plantations, confessedly the established
" Church: in the rest are many Congrega-
" tions adhering to it; and through the late
" Extension of the *British* Dominions, it is
" likely that there will be more. All Mem-
" bers of every Church are, according to the
" Principles of Liberty, entitled to every Part
" of what they conceive to be the Benefits

 " of

" of it, entire and complete, so far as consists " with the Welfare of civil Government. " Yet the Members of our Church in *America* " do not thus enjoy its Benefits, having no " Protestant Bishop within three thousand " Miles of them; a Case which never had " its Parallel before in the Christian World. " Therefore it is desired that two or more " Bishops may be appointed for them, to reside " where his Majesty shall think most conve- " nient; that they may have no Concern in " the least with any Persons who do not pro- " fess themselves to be of the Church of " *England*, but may ordain Ministers for such " as do; may confirm their Children when " brought to them at a fit Age for that Pur- " pose; and take such Oversight of the epis- " copal Clergy, as the Bishop of *London's* " Commissaries in those Parts have been em- " powered to take, and have taken without " Offence. But it is not desired in the least " that they should hold Courts to try matri- " monial or testamentary Causes; or be vested " with any Authority now exercised, either " by provincial Governors, or subordinate " Magistrates; or infringe or diminish any " Privileges and Liberties, enjoyed by any of " the Laiety, even of our own Communion.

" This

"This is the real and the only Scheme that "hath been planned for Biſhops in *America*; "and whoever hath heard of any other, hath "been miſinformed through Miſtake or De- "ſign *." And as to the Place of their Reſidence, his Grace further declares, "that it "neither is, nor ever was intended or deſired "to fix one in *New-England*; but epiſcopal "Colonies have always been propoſed †."

The Doctor on reading this Account confeſſed ‡, that if it were the true one, "he had "been miſinformed himſelf, and knew of "others who had been ſo in common with "him; and that if ſuch a Scheme as this "were carried into Execution, and only ſuch "Conſequences were to follow, as the Propoſer had profeſſedly in View, he could not "object againſt it, except on the ſame Principle that he ſhould object againſt the "Church of *England* in general §."

As it came however from an unknown Writer, he thought himſelf at Liberty to conſider it as Nothing more than the imaginary Scheme of a private Man, till it was confirmed by better Authority ||. It now appears to have come from the beſt Authority, and it

* Anſwer to MAYHEW, P. 59. † Ib. 66. ‡ *Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 59. § Ib. P. 79. || Ib. P. 61.

is certain that this Mode of establishing Bishops in *America*, was not invented merely "to serve a present Turn *, being precisely the same with that proposed by Bishop BUTLER twenty Years ago †; and with that mentioned by his Grace, in his *Letter to the Right Honourable* HORATIO WALPOLE, Esquire, written when he was Bishop of *Oxford*, and published since his Death ‡ by his Executors, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, and Dr. DANIEL BURTON; in which the whole Affair is set in a right Point of View, his own Sentiments upon it more fully explained, and an Answer given to the chief Objections against such a Proposal.

It is not necessary to enter here into the Merits of this Question. It is before the Public, and every one is enabled to judge for himself. But thus much, it is presumed, may safely be inferred from the Account here given of it; (which is the true one;) that the mere Proposal of such an Appointment, or rather the Encouragement of what had been long before proposed, is not a Crime of quite so unpardonable a Nature, as the Archbishop's

* *Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 61.

† See APTHORPE's *Review of* Dr. MAYHEW's *Remarks*, P. 55.

‡ In the Year 1769; and sold by RIVINGTON.

Adverſaries have been pleaſed to repreſent it. Poſterity will ſtand amazed, when they are told, that on this Account his Memory has been purſued in Pamphlets and News-papers with ſuch unrelenting Rancour, ſuch unexampled Wantonneſs of Abuſe, as he would ſcarce have deſerved, had he attempted to eradicate *Chriſtianity* out of *America*, and to introduce *Mahometaniſm* in its Room: whereas, the plain Truth is, that all he wiſhed for, was Nothing more than what the very beſt Friends to religious Freedom ever have wiſhed for, a complete Toleration for the Church of *England* in that Country. What an Idea muſt it give Mankind of his Grace's Character to have ſuch a Circumſtance ſingled out by his bittereſt Revilers as the moſt exceptionable Part of it!

But though the Archbiſhop was a ſincere and avowed Friend to that Meaſure, yet it was by no Means the only or the principal Object of his Concern in Regard to the Colonies. The Advancement of true Piety and Learning, the Converſion of the *Indians* and *Negroes*, as far as it was practicable, the Eſtabliſhment of proper Schools, the Diſtribution of uſeful Books, the good Conduct of the Miſſionaries, the Preſervation of Peace and Harmony amongſt the different religious

Communities in those Parts of the *British* Empire; these Things had a very large Share in his Thoughts, and in the Correspondence which he constantly kept up with a few of the ablest and worthiest Men in the *American* Provinces. The Letters which he wrote to them, on these and such like Subjects, are highly expressive of his pastoral Character; and represent in a very pleasing Light his truly benevolent Disposition, his Condescension to Persons of the lowest Station, his indefatigable Application to every Affair that came before him, his Zeal to promote the Interests of Religion in general, and the Church of *England* in particular; not by warm and violent Counsels, but by Methods of Tenderness and brotherly Kindness towards those who embraced a different Interest. Of these Things the *Americans* will ever retain a grateful Remembrance; and have, in their Letters to this Country, expressed their Sense of his kind Attention to them in the strongest and most affectionate Terms.

Whenever any Publications came to his Knowledge that were manifestly calculated to corrupt good Morals, or subvert the Foundations of Christianity, he did his utmost to stop the Circulation of them: yet the wretched Authors

Authors themſelves he was ſo far from wiſh-ing to treat with any undue Rigour, that he has more than once extended his Bounty to them in Diſtreſs. And when their Writings could not properly be ſuppreſſed (as was too often the Caſe) by lawful Authority, he en-gaged Men of Abilities to anſwer them, and rewarded them for their Trouble. His Atten-tion was every where. Even the Falſhoods and Miſrepreſentations of Writers in the News-Papers on religious or eccleſiaſtical Subjects, he generally took Care to have con-tradicted; and when they ſeemed likely to injure in any material Degree the Cauſe of Virtue and Religion, or the Reputation of eminent and worthy Men, he would ſome-times take the Trouble of anſwering them himſelf. One Inſtance of this Kind, which does him Honour, and deſerves Mention, was his Defence of Biſhop BUTLER, who, in a Pamphlet, publiſhed in the Year 1767, was accuſed of having died a Papiſt. This ſtrange Slander, founded on the weakeſt Pretences and moſt trivial Circumſtances that can be imagined, no one was better qualified to con-fute than the Archbiſhop; as well from his long and intimate Knowledge of Biſhop BUTLER, as from the Information given him

at the Time by thoſe who attended his Lordſhip in his laſt Illneſs, and were with him when he died. Accordingly, by an Article in a News-Paper, ſigned *Miſopſeudes*, his Grace challenged the Author of that Pamphlet to produce his Authority for what he had advanced; and in a ſecond Article defended the Biſhop againſt him; and in a third (all with the ſame Signature) confuted another Writer, who, under the Name of *A real Proteſtant*, ſtill maintained that ridiculous Calumny. His Antagoniſts were effectually ſubdued, and his Superiority to them was publicly acknowledged by a ſenſible and candid Man, who ſigned himſelf, and who really was, *A diſſenting Miniſter*. Surely, it is a very unwiſe Piece of Policy, in thoſe who profeſs themſelves Enemies to Popery, to take ſo much Pains to bring the moſt reſpectable Names within its Pale; and to give it the Merit of having gained over thoſe who were the brighteſt Ornaments and firmeſt Supports of the Proteſtant Cauſe.

The Welfare, the Credit, the good Influence of the Clergy he had entirely at Heart, and ſuffered Nothing to eſcape his Notice, that could in any proper Way promote them. He earneſtly endeavoured to prevent unworthy

Men

Men from bringing Disgrace on the Profession and Contempt on Religion, by entering into Orders. With this View it was that he so strongly recommended the greatest Care and Caution in signing Testimonials. "They "are," says he *, "the only ordinary Information that we have in a Case of the "utmost Importance, where we have a Right "to be informed. For no one can imagine, "that we are to ordain whoever comes, or "depend on clandestine Intelligence. We "must therefore, and do depend on regular "Testimonials,—every Part of which ought "to be considered before it is given, and no "Consideration paid to Neighbourhood, "Acquaintance, Friendship, Compassion, "Importunity, when they stand in Compe-"tition with Truth.---It may be sometimes "hard for you to refuse your Hand to im-"proper Persons; but it is only one of the "many Hardships which Conscience bids "Men undergo resolutely when they are "called to them. It would be much harder, "that your Bishop should be misled, the "Church of God injured, and the poor "Wretch himself assisted to invade sacrilegi-"ously an Office, at the Thought of which

* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, P. 222.

"he

" he hath cause to tremble *." If any such however had unhappily found Means to obtain Ordination, he did his utmost to prevent their further Progress; or if that could not be done, very openly signified his Dislike of their Conduct; nor could he ever bring himself to treat them, however considerable their Rank might be, with any Marks of Esteem or Respect.

Men of Worth and Eminence in the Church he cherished and befriended, and endeavoured to bring forward into Stations where they might be singularly useful. Above all he distinguished, with peculiar Marks of his Favour, the conscientious and diligent Parish Priest. He was of Opinion, that " the main " Support of Piety and Morals consisted in " the parochial Labours of the Clergy; and " that, if this Country could be preserved " from utter Profligateness and Ruin, it must " be by their Means †." For their Assistance therefore in one important Branch of their Duty, he gave them in his third archiepiscopal Charge Directions for writing and speaking Sermons. The Thoughts of such a Man, on so nice and difficult a Subject, must

* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, P. 226.
† Ibid, P. 239.

naturally

naturally raiſe ſome Expectation, and that Expectation will not be diſappointed. They are the evident Reſult of a ſound Judgment, matured by long Experience and a thorough Knowledge of Mankind, and are every Way worthy of one who was himſelf ſo great a Maſter of that Species of Compoſition and Elocution. It was his Purpoſe, after ſpeaking of ſtated Inſtructions, to have gone on to occaſional ones; but he did not live, as he himſelf foreboded he ſhould not, to accompliſh that Deſign.

The Conduct which he obſerved towards the ſeveral Diviſions and Denominations of Chriſtians in this Kingdom, was ſuch as ſhewed his Way of thinking to be truly liberal and catholic. The dangerous Spirit of Popery indeed, he thought, ſhould always be kept under proper legal Reſtraints, on Account of its natural Oppoſition not only to the religious, but the civil Rights of Mankind. He therefore obſerved its Movements with Care, and exhorted his Clergy to do the ſame, eſpecially thoſe who were ſituated in the Midſt of Roman Catholic Families; againſt whoſe Influence they were charged to be upon their Guard, and were furniſhed with proper Books, or Inſtructions for that Purpoſe. He took all

all fit Opportunities of combating the Errors of the Church of *Rome* in his own Writings *; and the best Answers, which were published to some of the late bold Apologies for Popery, were written at his Instance, and under his Direction. He had the good Fortune to preserve some Persons of Consequence from embracing that Communion, and to receive several Converts from it, both of the Clergy and Laity, into the Church of *England*. When the Earl of *Radnor* moved in the House of Lords for an Enquiry into the Number of Roman Catholics in this Kingdom, his Grace was very active in forwarding that Measure. The Return for his own Diocese was no more than 271; that, for all the Dioceses in *England* and *Wales*, did not exceed 68,000; which, even when all due Allowances are made for unavoidable Errors of Computation in great Towns, more especially in *London*, fell far short of what by some well-meaning Persons they were supposed or represented to be †. And if we further reflect how many wealthy

* See particularly his Sermons on the Rebellion in 1745, on the Protestant Working-Schools in *Ireland*, on the 5th of *November*, and a great Number of occasional Passages to the same Purpose, in various Parts of his *Lectures*, *Sermons*, and other Works.

† Dr. MAYHEW affirms, that in the Year 1745 the Papists in *London* only were 100,000, and that the People there were said to

wealthy and noble Families in these Kingdoms have lately embraced the Protestant Religion, each of which would probably draw after it several other Converts of inferior Rank, it will appear perhaps the better-grounded Conjecture of the two, (for it must at last be all Conjecture) that Popery is rather in a declining than a progressive State amongst us. Certain at least it is, that some late Events on the neighbouring Continent have shaken this huge Fabric of Superstition to its very Foundation. One of its grand Supports, the Society of *Jesuits*, is, in many Places, totally subverted; and the *Papal* Power itself is every where falling into Contempt. One may therefore surely hope, that Absurdities which visibly lose Ground even in the most bigotted Countries, will not stand much Chance of retrieving their Loss in this enlightened one.

But though thus prudently jealous of this corrupt Church, towards his Protestant Brethren of all Persuasions, he demeaned himself

to be converted by hundreds and thousands, if not ten thousands every Year.—*Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 73. Had the good Doctor's Account been true, and these Conversions gone on (as some have imagined) encreasing ever since, there would hardly have been a Protestant left by this Time in the Metropolis.

with

with great Mildneſs and Moderation. One very ſtriking Proof of this occurs in the Directions he gives his Clergy, with Regard to their Conduct towards thoſe who are commonly diſtinguiſhed by the Name of Methodiſts *. It is impoſſible to read that Paſſage without acknowledging the Juſtneſs of it, and conceiving the higheſt Opinion of the Writer's Philanthropy and good Senſe.

With the *Diſſenters* his Grace was ſincerely deſirous of cultivating a good Underſtanding. Though firmly attached to the Church of *England*, and ready on all proper Occaſions to defend its Diſcipline and Doctrines with becoming Spirit; yet it never inſpired him with any Deſire to oppreſs or aggrieve thoſe of a different Way of thinking, or to depart from the Principles of religious Liberty, by which he conſtantly regulated his own Conduct †, and wiſhed that all others would regulate theirs. He conſidered the Proteſtant

* Second archiepiſcopal Charge, P. 280.

† A ſtrong Confirmation of theſe Aſſertions may be ſeen in one of his Grace's Letters to Dr. LARDNER, written when he was Biſhop of *Oxford*, and preſerved in the Memoirs of that learned Man, which have been lately publiſhed, P. 98.

Dissenters in general as a conſcientious and valuable Claſs of Men, and was far from taking the Spirit of certain Writings to be the Spirit of the whole Body. With ſome of the moſt eminent of them, WATTS, DODDRIDGE, LELAND, CHANDLER, LARDNER, he maintained an Intercourſe of Friendſhip or Civility; by the moſt candid and conſiderate Part of them he was highly reverenced and eſteemed; and to ſuch amongſt them as needed Help, ſhewed no leſs Kindneſs and Liberality than to thoſe of his own Communion.

Nor was his Concern for the Proteſtant Cauſe confined to his own Country. He was well known as the great Patron and Protector of it in various Parts of *Europe*; from whence he had frequent Applications for Aſſiſtance, which never failed of being favourably received. To ſeveral foreign Proteſtants he allowed Penſions, to others he gave occaſional Relief, and to ſome of their Univerſities was an annual Benefactor.

There is therefore the utmoſt Reaſon to believe that he ſpoke the Language of his Heart, in Relation to theſe Matters, in the Concluſion of his Anſwer to Dr. MAYHEW, which well deſerves to be here laid at full Length before the Reader.

" Our Inclination is to live in Friendſhip
" with all the Proteſtant Churches. We aſſiſt
" and protect thoſe on the Continent of *Eu-*
" *rope* as well as we are able. We ſhew our
" Regard to that of *Scotland* as often as we
" have an Opportunity, and believe the Mem-
" bers of it are ſenſible that we do. To
" thoſe who differ from us in this Part of the
" Kingdom, we neither attempt nor wiſh any
" Injury; and we ſhall gladly give Proofs to
" every Denomination of Chriſtians in our
" Colonies, that we are Friends to a Tolera-
" tion even of the moſt intolerant, as far as it
" is ſafe; and willing that all Mankind ſhould
" poſſeſs all the Advantages, religious and
" civil, which they can demand either in Law
" or Reaſon. But with thoſe who approach
" nearer to us in Faith and brotherly Love,
" we are deſirous to cultivate a freer Com-
" munication, paſſing over all former Diſ-
" guſts, as we beg that they would. If we
" give them any ſeeming Cauſe of Complaint,
" we hope they will ſignify it in the moſt
" amicable Manner. If they publiſh it, we
" hope they will preſerve Fairneſs and Tem-
" per. If they fail in either we muſt bear
" it with Patience, but be excuſed from re-
" plying. If any Writers on our Side have

" been leſs cool or leſs civil than they ought " and deſigned to have been, we are ſorry for " it, and exhort them to change their Style " if they write again. For it is the Duty " of all Men, how much ſoever they differ " in Opinion, to agree in mutual Good-will " and kind Behaviour *."

This Paſſage Dr. MAYHEW himſelf allows † to be written " in ſuch a candid, " ſenſible, and charitable Way, as did the " Author great Honour, ſhewed the amiable " Spirit of Chriſtianity in an advantageous " Light," and was worthy the Pen of a Metropolitan, " whoſe Chriſtian Modera- " tion," he acknowledges to be " not the " leaſt ſhining Part of his reſpectable Cha- " racter ‡." And it may on the beſt Grounds be added, that Archbiſhop SECKER in this Place not only expreſſed his own real Sentiments, but thoſe of the preſent truly benevolent Primate, and of far the greateſt Part in every Rank of the *Engliſh* Clergy in general.

In public Affairs his Grace acted the Part of an honeſt Citizen, and a worthy Member of the *Britiſh* Legiſlature. From his very

* Anſwer to MAYHEW, P. 68.
† MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Pamphlet, P. 83.
‡ Ibid. P. 86.

first Entrance into the House of Peers, his parliamentary Conduct was uniformly upright and noble. He kept equally clear from the two Extremes of factious Petulance and servile Dependance; never wantonly thwarting Administration, from Motives of Party-Zeal, or private Pique, or personal Attachment, or a Passion for Popularity; nor yet going every Length with every Minister, from Views of Interest or Ambition. He admired and loved the Constitution of his Country, and wished to preserve it unaltered and unimpaired. So long as a due Regard to this was maintained, he thought it his Duty to support the Measures of Government. But whenever they were evidently inconsistent with the public Welfare, he opposed them with Freedom and Firmness. Yet his Opposition was always tempered with the utmost Fidelity, Respect, and Decency, to the excellent Prince upon the Throne; and the most candid Allowances for the unavoidable Errors and Infirmities even of the very best Ministers, and the peculiarly difficult Situation of those who govern a free and high-spirited People. He seldom spoke in Parliament, except where the Interests of Religion and Virtue seemed to require it; but

whenever

whenever he did, he ſpoke with Propriety and Strength, and was heard with Attention and Deference. Though he never attached himſelf blindly to any one Set of Men, yet his chief political Connections were with the late Duke of NEWCASTLE, and Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE. To theſe he principally owed his Advancement, and he had the good Fortune to live long enough to ſhew his Gratitude to them or their Deſcendants, particularly to the former of them: with whoſe Solicitations though he did not always think it neceſſary to comply, when that Nobleman was at the Head of Affairs; yet when he was out of Power, the Archbiſhop readily embraced every Opportunity of obliging him; and gave him ſo many ſolid and undeniable Proofs of Friendſhip, that the Duke always ſpoke of his Grace's Behaviour to him in the ſtrongeſt Terms of Approbation, and made particular Mention of it to ſome of his Friends but a very ſhort Time before his own Death.

During more than ten Tears that Dr. SECKER enjoyed the See of *Canterbury*, he reſided conſtantly at his archiepiſcopal Houſe at *Lambeth*; as being not only moſt commodiouſly ſituated for his own Studies and Employments, but for all thoſe who on various

Occasions were continually obliged to have Recourse to him. These Reasons weighed with him so much, that no Consideration, not even that of Health itself, could ever prevail upon him to quit that Place for any Length of Time. A few Months before his Death indeed, the dreadful Pains he felt had compelled him to think of trying the *Bath* Waters; but that Design was stopt by the fatal Accident which put an End to his Life.

His Grace had been for many Years subject to the Gout, which in the latter Part of his Life returned with more Frequency and Violence, and did not go off in a regular Manner, but left the Parts affected for a long Time very weak, and was succeeded by Pains in different Parts of the Body. About a Year and a half before he died, after a Fit of the Gout, he was attacked with a Pain in the Arm near the Shoulder, which having continued about a Twelvemonth, a similar Pain seized the upper and outer Part of the opposite Thigh, and the Arm soon became easier. This was much more grievous than the former, as it quickly disabled him from walking, and kept him in almost continual Torment, except when he was in a reclined Position. During this Time he had two or three Fits of

of the Gout; but neither the Gout nor Medicines alleviated theſe Pains, which, with the Want of Exerciſe, brought him into a general bad Habit of Body.

On *Saturday* the 30th of *July*, 1768, he was ſeized, as he ſat at Dinner, with a Sickneſs at his Stomach. He recovered himſelf before Night, but the next Evening, whilſt his Phyſicians were attending, and his Servants raiſing him on his Couch, he ſuddenly cried out that his Thigh-bone was broken. The Shock was ſo violent, that the Servants perceived the Couch to ſhake under him, and the Pain ſo acute and unexpected, that it overcame the Firmneſs he ſo remarkably poſſeſſed. He lay for ſome Time in great Agonies, but when the Surgeons arrived, and diſcovered with Certainty that the Bone was broken, he was perfectly reſigned, and never afterwards aſked a Queſtion about the Event. A Fever ſoon enſued. On *Tueſday* he became lethargic, and continued ſo till about Five o'Clock on *Wedneſday* Afternoon, when he expired with great Calmneſs, in the 75th Year of his Age.

On Examination, the Thigh-bone was found to be carious about four Inches in Length, and at nearly the ſame Diſtance from its Head. The Diſeaſe took its Riſe from

the internal Part of the Bone, and had ſo intirely deſtroyed its Subſtance, that Nothing remained at the Part where it was broken but a Portion of its outward Integument. And even this had many Perforations, one of which was large enough to admit two Fingers, and was filled with a fungous Subſtance ariſing from within the Bone. There was no Appearance of Matter about the Caries, and the ſurrounding Parts were in a ſound State. It was apparent, that the Torture which his Grace underwent during the gradual Corroſion of this Bone, muſt have been inexpreſſibly great. Out of Tenderneſs to his Family he ſeldom made any Complaints to them, but to his Phyſicians he frequently declared his Pains were ſo excruciating, that unleſs ſome Relief could be procured, he thought it would be impoſſible for human Nature to ſupport them long. Yet he bore them for upwards of ſix Months with aſtoniſhing Patience and Fortitude; ſat up generally the greater Part of the Day, admitted his particular Friends to ſee him, mixed with his Family at the uſual Hours, ſometimes with his uſual Chearfulneſs; and, except ſome very ſlight Defects of Memory, retained all his Faculties and Senſes in their full Vigour till within a few Days of his Death.

He

He was buried, pursuant to his own Directions, in a covered Passage, leading from a private Door of the Palace to the North Door of *Lambeth* Church; and he forbade any Monument or Epitaph to be placed over him.

By his Will he appointed the Reverend Dr. DANIEL BURTON, Canon of *Christ Church*, and Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT above-mentioned, his Executors; and left thirteen thousand Pounds in the three *per Cent.* Annuities, to Dr. PORTEUS and Dr. STINTON, his Chaplains, in Trust; to pay the Interest thereof to Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter, during their joint Lives, or the Life of the Survivor; and after the Decease of both those Ladies, then eleven thousand of the said thirteen thousand are to be transferred to the following charitable Purposes; *viz.*

	£.	s.	d.
To the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, for the general Uses of the Society - -	1000	0	0
To the same Society, towards the Establishment of a Bishop or Bishops in the King's Dominions in *America* -	1000	0	0

To

	£. s. d.
To the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge	500 0 0
To the *Irish* Protestant Working Schools - -	500 0 0
To the Corporation for relieving the Widows and Children of the poor Clergy - -	500 0 0
To the Society of the Stewards of the said Charity - -	200 0 0
To *Bromley* College in *Kent* -	500 0 0
To the Hospitals of the Archbishop of *Canterbury*, at *Croydon*, *St. John* at *Canterbury*, and *St. Nicholas Harbledown*, £.500 each - - -	1500 0 0
To *St. George*'s and the *London* Hospitals, and the Lying-in Hospital in *Brownlow-street*, £.500 each - -	1500 0 0
To the Asylum in the Parish of *Lambeth* - - -	400 0 0
To the *Magdalen Hospital*, the *Lock Hospital*, the *Small-Pox* and *Inoculation Hospital*, to each of which his Grace was a Subscriber, £.300 each -	900 0 0

To

	£. s. d.
To the Incurables at *St. Luke's* *Hospital* - - -	500 0 0
Towards repairing or rebuilding the Houses belonging to poor Livings in the Diocese of *Canterbury* - -	2000 0 0
	£.11000 0 0

Besides these Benefactions, he left £.1000 to be distributed amongst his Servants; £.200 to such indigent Persons as he had assisted in his Life-time; £.5000 to the two Daughters of his Nephew Mr. FROST; £.500 to Mrs. SECKER, Widow of his Nephew Dr. GEORGE SECKER; and £.200 to Dr. DANIEL BURTON. After the Payment of these and some other smaller Legacies, he left his real, and the Residue of his personal, Estate to his Nephew Mr. THOMAS FROST, of *Nottingham*.

Out of his private Library, he left to the archiepiscopal one at *Lambeth* all such Books as were not there before, which comprehended much the largest and most valuable Part of his own Collection; and a great Number of very learned MSS. written by himself on various Subjects,

Subjects, he bequeathed to the Manuscript Library in the same Palace. His Lectures on the Catechism, his Manuscript Sermons, &c. he left to be revised and published by his two Chaplains, Dr. STINTON and Dr. PORTEUS. His Options he gave to the Archbishop of *Canterbury*, the Bishop of *London*, and the Bishop of *Winchester*, for the Time being, in Trust; to be disposed of by them (as they become vacant) to such Persons as they shall in their Consciences think it would have been most reasonable and proper for him to have given them, had he been living.

Such were the last Bequests of Archbishop SECKER; of which it is enough to say, that they kept up the noble Uniformity of his Character to the End, and formed a very proper Conclusion to the Life of a truly great and good Man.

His Grace was in his Person tall and comely; in the early Part of Life slender, and rather consumptive, but as he advanced in Years, his Constitution gained Strength, and his Size encreased, yet never to a Degree of Corpulency that was disproportionate or troublesome.

The

The Dignity of his Form corresponded well with the Greatneſs of his Mind, and inſpired at all Times Reſpect and Awe, but peculiarly ſo when he was engaged in any of the more ſolemn Functions of Religion; into which he entered with ſuch devout Earneſtneſs and Warmth, with ſo juſt a Conſciouſneſs of the Place he was in, and the Buſineſs he was about, as ſeemed to raiſe him above himſelf, and added new Life and Spirit to the natural Gracefulneſs of his Appearance.

His Countenance was open, ingenuous, and expreſſive of every Thing right. It varied eaſily with his Spirits and his Feelings; ſo as to be a faithful Interpreter of his Mind, which was incapable of the leaſt Diſſimulation. It could ſpeak Dejection, and on Occaſion, Anger, very ſtrongly. But when it meant to ſhew Pleaſure or Approbation, it ſoftened into the moſt gracious Smile, and diffuſed over all his Features the moſt benevolent and reviving Complacency that can be imagined.

His intellectual Abilities were of a much higher Claſs than they who never had any Opportunities of converſing intimately with him, and who form their Opinion of his Talents

Talents from the general Plainneſs of his Language only, will perhaps be willing to allow. He had a quick Apprehenſion, a clear Diſcernment, a ſound Judgment, a retentive Memory. He poſſeſſed that native good Senſe, which is the grand Maſter-key to every Art and Science, and makes a Man ſkilful in Things he has never learnt, as ſoon as ever it becomes uſeful or neceſſary for him to know them. He compoſed with great Eaſe and Readineſs; and in the early Part of his Life, the Letters which he wrote to ſome of his moſt intimate Friends, were full of Imagination, Vivacity, and Elegance. But when he became a Pariſh-Prieſt, he found the Graces of Style inconſiſtent with the Purpoſes of paſtoral Inſtruction; and willingly ſacrificed the Reputation he might eaſily have acquired as a fine Writer, to the leſs ſhowy Qualifications of a uſeful one. From that Time he made it his principal Study to ſet every Thing he undertook to treat upon in the cleareſt Point of View; to bring his Thoughts and his Arguments as cloſe together, and to expreſs them in as few and as intelligible Words as poſſible; admitting none but what conveyed ſome new Idea, or were neceſſary

necessary to throw new Light on the Subject; and never wasting his own Time or that of others, by stepping out of his Way for needless Embellishments. But though in general he thus confined himself to the severe Laws of didactic Composition, (in which indeed consisted his chief Excellence) yet he could be, where the Occasion called for it, pathetic, animated, nervous; could rise into that true Sublime, which consists not in Pomp of Diction but Grandeur of Sentiment, expressed with Simplicity and Strength; of which his Sermons afford several admirable Specimens.

It seldom happens that Men of a studious Turn acquire any great Degree of Reputation for their Knowledge of Business. That Love of Solitude and Contemplation which generally attends true Genius, and is necessary for any considerable Exertion of it, gives at the same Time a certain Indolence and Softness to the Mind, which equally indisposes and unfits it for taking a Part in the busy Scenes of Life. But Dr. SECKER's Talents were formed no less for Action than Speculation; nor was he more embarrassed with Difficulties in the most intricate Affairs, than in the deepest Studies. In all the several Stations that

that he paſſed through, he let Nothing ſuffer for Want of Attention and Care. Wherever his Advice and Aſſiſtance were called for, he never failed to be preſent, was ſcrupulouſly punctual to his Appointments, ſhewed himſelf a perfect Maſter of the Buſineſs that came before him, and went through it with Calmneſs and Diſpatch. And it was very obſervable, that though in all important Tranſactions, no one had greater Ideas, or proceeded on more enlarged and liberal Principles; yet where it was neceſſary, he could take Notice of the ſmalleſt and ſeemingly moſt trifling Circumſtances, and enter into the minuteſt Details with a Penetration and Exactneſs, which are ſeldom ſeen even in thoſe who are moſt practiſed in worldly Concerns.

His Learning was very extenſive, and on thoſe Points, which he ſtudied with any Degree of Attention, profound. He was well acquainted with the Greek and Latin Languages; had in the younger Part of his Life read with Taſte the beſt Authors in each; and of the latter more eſpecially had imbibed ſo ſtrong a Tincture, that when he was near ſeventy, after a Diſuſe of above forty Years, he compoſed the Latin Speech printed

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at the End of his Charges; the Style of which is nervous, manly, and correct.

He possessed a large Share of critical Penetration, and scarce ever read any Book of Note without making Remarks upon it. Some of these still remain amongst his Manuscripts. Some he communicated at different Times to the Editors or Translators of several Classic Authors. But his chief Labours of this Kind were bestowed on the holy Scriptures, for which he came well prepared by his Knowledge of the original Languages in which they were writtten. In *Hebrew* Literature more especially, his Skill was so well known and acknowledged, that few Works of Eminence in that Branch of Learning were published, without being first submitted to his Examination, and receiving considerable Improvement from his Corrections. He was the first Promoter, and always a liberal Encourager, of that very useful Work, *The Collation of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Old Testament*, undertaken by Dr. KENNICOTT, and now brought to a Conclusion. The greatest Part of his leisure Hours was employed in studying the original Text of the sacred Writings; in comparing it with all the

antient Versions; in collecting together the Remarks made upon it by the most ingenious and learned Authors, antient and modern, Jewish and Christian; in applying to the same Purpose every Thing he accidentally met with in the Course of his reading, that had any Tendency to explain and illustrate it; and superadding to the Whole, his own Observations and Conjectures, some of which have been since confirmed by the best Manuscripts. The Result of these Labours appears, in some Degree, in the short and masterly Explications of Scripture, interspersed occasionally in his Lectures and Sermons; but more particularly in the interleaved Bibles, and the theological Dissertations hereafter mentioned.

But his Attention was not solely confined to the Scriptures. He had studied carefully some of the best Christian Writers of the primitive Ages, and without relying implicitly on their Judgement, or adopting their Errors, knew well how to avail himself of their real Excellencies. Of ecclesiastical History he was a great Master: had a clear Idea of the Progress of Christianity from its first Promulgation to the present Times, of the various Revolu-

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tions it had paſſed through, the different Grounds on which it had been oppoſed or vindicated, the Steps by which the Corruptions of it had been gradually introduced, the Arts by which they had been ſo long maintained, and the providential Coincidence of Events which afterwards contributed to remove them. He was well acquainted with the various Sects, into which the Church was antiently, and is at preſent divided; he underſtood the Nature and Tendency of their reſpective Tenets, the State of the Controverſies ſubſiſting amongſt them, the reſpective Merits of their beſt Writers, the proper Conduct to be obſerved towards each, and the good Uſes that might be made of all. And though in his Writings he never made a needleſs Oſtentation of all this Learning, yet, they who examine ſome of the plaineſt of them cloſely and critically, will find them to be the Reſult of deep Thought and a comprehenſive Knowledge of his Subject; will find that he expreſſes himſelf on almoſt every Point with Propriety, Preciſion, and Certainty; without any Thing crude or injudicious, without any of thoſe raſh Aſſertions and haſty Concluſions, into which they, who have but a ſuperficial

View of Things, and know not what Ground they ſtand upon, are perpetually falling.

The beſt modern Publications in moſt Parts of uſeful Learning, but more eſpecially thoſe which immediately related to his own Profeſſion, or were in any Degree connected with it, he conſtantly read; was one of the firſt to give a ſatisfactory Account of them, to commend them if they deſerved it, to point out and obviate their Errors, if they contained any which he thought material. But there was one Part of his literary Character extremely amiable, and, in the Degree at leaſt almoſt peculiar to him; and that was, the incredible Pains he would take in reviſing, correcting, and improving the Works of others. This he did in numberleſs Inſtances beſides thoſe which have here been mentioned, with equal Zeal and Judgment; and ſome of thoſe Compoſitions which now ſtand deſervedly higheſt in the Eſtimation of the Public, and will go down with encreaſing Fame to future Ages, owe no inconſiderable Share of their Merit to his Corrections and Communications.

The number of valuable Writings which he has left behind him is very conſiderable.

Beſides

Besides the two Volumes of occasional Sermons, which appeared in his Life-time, the Lectures on the Catechism and the Charges published since his Death, and the four Volumes of Sermons now offered to the Public, he has bequeathed to the Manuscript Library at *Lambeth*, a great Variety of learned and curious Pieces, written by himself, to be preserved there under the sole Care of the Archbishop for the Time being, and to be inspected by no one without his Grace's express Permission.

Amongst these Manuscripts, some of the most remarkable are; an interleaved *English* Bible, in four Volumes in Folio, with occasional Remarks; upon the New Testament very copious; tending chiefly to clear up Difficulties, and to correct and improve the present Translation, with a View probably to a new one; MICHAELIS'S *Hebrew* Bible, filled with Comparisons of the antient Versions, Emendations, and Conjectures on the original Text; two Folio Volumes of Notes upon *Daniel*; a great Number of critical Dissertations on controverted Passages of Scripture; Remarks on some modern Publications; and several Volumes of Miscellanies, written in the former

Part of his Life, containing chiefly Extracts from various Authors, and Observations upon them, the Objections of sceptical Writers to the Truth of Revelation, with Answers to some, and Materials or Hints for Answers to many others.

It may justly seem surprising, that in a Life so active, so full of Employment and Avocation from Study*, the Archbishop could find Leisure to read so much, and to leave behind him so many Writings; some of them learned and critical; all of them full of good Sense and useful Knowledge. The Fact is, that in him were united two Things which very rarely meet together, but, when they do, can produce Wonders, strong Parts, and unwearied Industry. He rose at Six the whole Year round, and had often spent a busy Day, before others began to enjoy it. His whole Time was marked out and appropriated in the most regular Manner to particular Employments, and

* Ille primum habuit in multiplicibus quibus districtus est curis, nulli deesse; neque quisquam fuit qui literarum studiis majorem operam otiosus posuit, quam ille occupatissimo in loco. In aliis quidem hominibus ingenium excellens, et multiplicem scientiam agnoscimus, in aliis consilium, auctoritatem, probitatem, constantiam; in quo autem hæc omnia ita abundè convenerint haud facilè inveniemus. *Concio ad Clerum, & oratiuncula, a Gulielmo Markham habitæ*, 1769, p. 25. Sold by T. PAYNE.

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he never suffered even those broken Portions of it, which are seldom much regarded, to be idly thrown away. The Strength of his Constitution happily kept Pace with the Activity of his Mind, and enabled him to go on incessantly from one Business to another with almost unremitted Application, till, his Spirits being quite exhausted, he was obliged at last to have Recourse to Rest, which however he always took Care to make as short as possible.

Industry like this, continued through a long Course of Years, could not possibly be the Effect of any Thing but that which was indeed at the Bottom of it, a strong Sense of Duty. It was not because the Archbishop had less Relish for Ease, or less Dislike to Fatigue than other Men, that his Diligence and Perseverance so far exceeded theirs; but because he thought himself bound to labour for the Good of Mankind, and that all Indolence and Self-indulgence, which interfered with this, was in some Degree criminal. Whenever therefore he was engaged (as he was almost continually) in serving others, he never reckoned his own Time or Pains for any Thing, nor did it seem so much as once to enter into his Thoughts, that he ought to allow himself

any Amuſement. Even the Pleaſures of polite Literature, which were highly grateful to him, he thought himſelf obliged to relinquiſh for the peculiar Studies of his Profeſſion, and theſe again for the practical Duties of Religion, and the daily Offices of common Life. On this Principle he made it a Point to be at all Times acceſſible. Even in thoſe early Hours, which were more peculiarly dedicated to Retirement and Study, if any one came to him on the ſmalleſt Pretence of Buſineſs, he would inſtantly break off the moſt pleaſing or moſt abſtruſe Speculations, receive his Viſiter with perfect good Humour, and ſacrifice thoſe precious Moments to Duty, to Civility, to the ſlighteſt Propriety, which he would on no Account have given up to Relaxation or Repoſe.

This indeed was only one Inſtance, amongſt many others, of that wonderful Command he had obtained over his moſt favourite Inclinations, and the Facility with which he controlled his ſtrongeſt Paſſions. His Temper was naturally quick and impatient; but by keeping a watchful Eye over the Movements of his own Mind, and preſcribing to himſelf certain excellent Rules and Precautions to which he inviolably adhered, he ſo totally ſubdued this

dangerous

dangerous Propensity, that few who knew him had any Suspicion of his being subject to it. Sometimes indeed, on very trying Occasions, he might be seen ready to kindle on a sudden into some Expressions of Anger, and as suddenly recollecting and checking himself; keeping down the rising Tumult within him, and resuming almost instantaneously his usual Mildness and Composure.

In him appeared all the Efficacy of religious Principle, the Calmness, the Greatness of Mind, the Fortitude, the Chearfulness, which no other Principle could inspire, support, and improve through a whole Life. That fervent yet rational Piety, which glowed in his Writings, which animated his Devotions, was the genuine Effusion of his Soul, the supreme Guide and Director of his Actions and Designs. It was not, as is sometimes the Case, assumed occasionally, and laid aside when the Eye of the World was not upon him; but was the same in private as in public, to those who observed him at a Distance, and those who lived and conversed intimately with him, who had Opportunities of seeing him at all Hours, and under all Circumstances, in his retired and serious as well as in his freest and most chearful

Moments.

Moments. The Honour of God, and the Intereſts of Religion, were evidently neareſt his Heart. He thought of them, he talked of them, he was concerned and anxious for them, he ſought out for Opportunities of advancing them, he was careful not to ſay or do any Thing that might hurt them in the Eſtimation of Mankind. This it was which kept up that uniform Decency and Propriety ſo remarkable in his whole Deportment, which preſerved him from every unbecoming Levity of Behaviour and Converſation, added Weight and Dignity to his Character, and raiſed him above all the common Meanneſſes of merely ſecular Men.

His Soul was generous beyond Deſcription. Even when his Income was but moderate, and the Proviſion made for his Family very ſlender, he lived hoſpitably, and gave liberally. As his Revenues encreaſed, his Beneficence roſe in Proportion, inſomuch, that after the firſt Expences of his Promotion to the See of *Canterbury* were over, his charitable Donations were conſiderably more than two thouſand Pounds a Year. On all proper Occaſions his Heart and his Hand were ſo free, that he ſeemed not to have, as indeed he had not, the leaſt

least Regard for Money. The Ease and Readiness with which he gave away the largest Sums, plainly shewed, that long Habit had rendered it quite natural and familiar to him, and that he saw Nothing wonderful or extraordinary in Acts of Generosity, which others could not observe without Surprise.'

They who applied to him on Account of any public Subscription, in Favour of any Thing useful or even ornamental to his Country, commonly received much more than they expected; and were frequently withheld from repeating their Solicitations, through Fear, not of being denied, but of trespassing too far on a Liberality that seemed to know no Bounds. In Matters of private Charity, the Number of indigent Persons whom he relieved by occasional Benefactions, or supported by annual Pensions, was very great. Yet his Favours were not lavished away with undistinguishing Profusion. He took Pains to find out the real Merits and Distresses of those who asked Relief from him, and endeavoured, as far as he was able, to single out the virtuous and religious, as peculiar Objects of his Bounty. He thought it a material Part of true Benevolence, to have an Eye not only to the Removal of Misery, but the Encourage-

ment of Piety and good Morals. With this View he was particularly attentive to ſuch Charities as were calculated to advance uſeful Knowledge or ſpiritual Improvement; which he made a Point of encouraging by his Example, not only as being in themſelves highly beneficial, but alſo ſtrangely diſregarded ſometimes by very worthy, and, in other Reſpects, very conſiderate Perſons.

In the Government of his Family, there was an Air of Eaſe and Generoſity without any Affectation of Magnificence or Show. His Houſe was hoſpitable, and his Table plentiful, yet plain and ſimple. He wiſhed to have every Thing ſuitable to his Rank, but would conſent to Nothing beyond it. He thought it right in one of his Station and Profeſſion to diſcountenance, as far as he could, all luxurious Elegancies. He would therefore never give into ſeveral faſhionable Accommodations, nor admit extraordinary Delicacies to his Table, nor even accept them when offered to him. He received his Company with Politeneſs and good Humour, and entertained them, when he was in Health and Spirits, with lively and improving Converſation. He could make pertinent Obſervations on almoſt any Topic that happened to be ſtarted, how remote

ſoever

ſoever from the natural Courſe of his Studies. Men of eminent Worth or Learning he diſtinguiſhed by peculiar Notice, led the Diſcourſe to ſuch Subjects as called out their reſpective Excellencies, and ſhewed that they ſpoke before one who could judge well of their Merits.

Yet it muſt be owned that he was not always equally affable and obliging. There was ſometimes a Reſerve and Coldneſs in his Manner, that threw a Damp on Converſation, and prevented Strangers from being perfectly at their Eaſe before him. This was by ſome imputed to Pride. But in Reality it aroſe from very different Cauſes: ſometimes from bodily Pain, which he often felt when he did not own it; ſometimes from his Spirits being waſted or depreſſed by the Fatigues of the Morning; ſometimes from accidental Uneaſineſſes ariſing in the Courſe of Buſineſs, which he could not immediately ſhake off his Mind. To this ſhould be added, that the natural Loftineſs of his Figure, and the Opinion generally and juſtly entertained of his Learning and Strictneſs of Life, were of themſelves apt to produce a Kind of Awe and Conſtraint in his Company, when he was far from wiſhing to inſpire it.

It

It was remarkable that he chose always rather to talk of Things than Persons; was very sparing in giving his Opinion of Characters, very candid when he did. Of his own good Deeds or great Attainments he never spoke, nor loved to hear others speak. Compliments were very irksome to him. They visibly put him out of Humour, and gave him actual Pain; and he would sometimes express his Dislike of them in such plain Terms, as effectually prevented a Repetition of them from the same Person.

To his Domestics he was a gentle and indulgent Master. Many of them he suffered to continue with their Families in his House after they were married. None of them were discharged on Account of Sickness or Infirmity, but were assisted with the best Advice that could be had at a great yearly Expence. Those who had attended him in Illness, or served him long and faithfully, he never failed to reward with an unsparing Hand. Towards his other Dependants, his Behaviour was even and friendly. He expected every one about him to do their Duty, of which he himself first set them the Example; and, provided they did so with any

tolerable Care, they were ſecure of his Favour. Of ſlight Faults he took no Notice; of great ones he would expreſs his Senſe at the Time ſtrongly; but never ſuffered them to dwell or rankle on his Mind, or operate to the future Prejudice of thoſe whoſe general Conduct was right. To his Relations he was continually doing the beſt-natured, the handſomeſt, the moſt generous Things; aſſiſting them in Difficulties, comforting them in Affliction, promoting their Intereſts, and improving their Circumſtances reaſonably, not aggrandizing or enriching them invidiouſly.

The unaltered Kindneſs he ſhewed to the two Ladies that lived with him from the Time of his Marriage to that of his Death, that is, for upwards of two-and-forty Years, was a remarkable Inſtance of ſteady Friendſhip; and ſhewed that his Soul was no leſs formed for that rare Union of virtuous Minds, than for every other generous Affection. The younger of thoſe two Ladies, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, (who, to the fineſt Imagination and the moſt elegant Accompliſhments of her Sex, added the gentleſt Manners, and a Diſpoſition thoroughly benevolent and devout,) did not long ſurvive the Arch-

Archbiſhop. She died on the 9th of *January* laſt, in the 49th Year of her Age.

Thus much it has been judged requiſite to lay before the World in Relation to Archbiſhop SECKER; not with any View of exalting his Character higher than it deſerves, which is quite needleſs; but of making its real Value more generally known, and of reſcuing it from the Miſrepreſentations of a few miſinformed or malevolent Men. To ſome, no Doubt, the Portrait here drawn of him will appear a very flattering one; but it will be much eaſier to call than to prove it ſuch. Nothing has been advanced but what is founded on the moſt authentic Evidence, nor has any Circumſtance been deſignedly ſtrained beyond the Truth. And if his Grace did really live and act in ſuch a Manner that the moſt faithful Delineation of his Conduct muſt neceſſarily have the Air of a Panegyric, the Fault is not in the Copy, but in the Original.

After this plain Repreſentation of Facts therefore, it cannot be thought neceſſary to enter here into a particular Examination of the various Falſhoods, which his Grace's Enemies have ſo induſtriouſly circulated in or-

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der to fix, if possible, some Stain upon his Reputation. It would be very unreasonable to expect that he of all others, so high in Rank and so active in the Discharge of his Duty, should, amidst the present Rage of Defamation, escape without his full Share of Censure; and it would be very weak to apprehend the least ill Consequences from it. There is so little Doubt from what Quarter those Invectives come, and to what Causes they are owing, that they do not appear to have made the slightest Impression on any unprejudiced Mind, and, for Want of Ground to support them, are sinking hourly into Oblivion. If a Life spent like Archbishop SECKER's, and a Spirit such as breathes through every Page of his Writings, are not a sufficient Confutation of all such idle Calumnies, it is in vain to think that any Thing else can be so. All that his Friends have to do, is to wait a little while with Patience and Temper. Time never fails to do ample Justice to such Characters as his; which, if left to themselves, will always rise by their own Force above the utmost Efforts made to depress them, and acquire fresh Lustre every Day in the Eyes of all considerate and dispassionate Men.

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SER-

SERMON I.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all Appearance of Evil.

BY the extensive Word, *all*, the Apostle in this Place evidently means no more, than *all Things* which may be right or wrong in Point of Conscience. And by *proving them* he means, not that we should try them both by Experience, which would be an absurd and pernicious Direction: but that we should examine them by our Faculty of Judgment, which is a wise and useful Exhortation. Accordingly Christianity recommends itself to us at first Sight by this peculiar Presumption of its being the true Religion, that it makes Application to Men as reasonable Creatures, and claims our Assent on Account of the Proofs, which it offers. By these alone it prevailed originally: on these it still relies; and requires

Faith for the Principle of our Obedience, only becaufe it produces Evidence for the Ground of our Faith. Now fuch an Inftitution furely is intitled to receive the fair Treatment which it gives, when it afks of Mankind no more than this; that they fhould firft confider well the feveral Obligations they are under; then adhere to whatever they find to be enjoined them, and laftly avoid whatever they conceive to be forbidden: which momentous Duties I fhall endeavour to explain and enforce in three Difcourfes on the Text.

That Beings, capable of Thought, are obliged to think, is very obvious: that they fhould think with the greateft Care on Subjects of the greateft Importance, is equally fo: and the Queftion, what Obligations we are under, is plainly of the utmoft Importance. For our Behaviour, and confequently our Happinefs, depends on the Determination of it. Therefore we are juft as much bound to conduct our Underftandings well, as our Tempers or outward Actions. And the Opportunities given us of fhewing, either Diligence in procuring Information, and Fairnefs in judging upon it, or the contrary, are Trials, which God hath appointed, of every one's moral Character; and

and perhaps the chief Trials, which some have to go through. Every Inſtance, greater or leſs, of wilfully diſregarding Truth, inſtead of ſeeking and embracing it, argues a proportionable Depravity of Heart; whether the Diſlike be manifeſted in a ſtudious Oppoſition to it, or an indolent Scorn of it.

There are ſome who openly profeſs an utter Contempt of all Inquiry; deſpiſe ſuch as are ſolicitous either about Belief or Practice, and even affect a Thoughtleſſneſs, which they find to be grown faſhionable. Now really, if this be an Accompliſhment, it is one, that whoever will may eaſily be Maſter of. But ſurely Men ought to think ſeriouſly once for all, before they reſolve for the reſt of their Days to think no more. There are ſtrong Appearances, that many Things of great Conſequence are incumbent on us. No one can be ſure, that theſe Appearances are fallacious, till he hath examined into them. Many, who have, are fully perſuaded of their Truth. And if there be ſuch Things in the World as Folly and Guilt, it can never be either wiſe or innocent to diſdain giving ourſelves any Trouble about the Matter, and take it abſolutely for granted, that we may live as we will: a De-

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cision of ſuch a Nature, that were it made on ſeemingly ever ſo good Grounds, it would be very fit to review them well from Time to Time, for Fear of a Miſtake that muſt be fatal.

And if a general Neglect of conſidering our Conduct be criminal, a Neglect of conſidering any Part of it muſt, in its Degree, be criminal alſo. Many have weighed carefully, and obſerve conſcientiouſly, ſome Duties of Life; but will not reflect a Moment, whether it be allowable for them to behave, in other Points, as they do. And yet, if any moral Obligation deſerves Regard, every ſuch Obligation deſerves it equally. And when the Queſtion comes to be, what is indeed ſuch, and what not, impartial Reaſon, well directed, muſt be Judge; not Inclination or Fancy: for if theſe can make Things lawful, nothing will be unlawful. And therefore, inſtead of ever following ſuch Guides implicitly, we ſhould always have the greater Suſpicion that we are going wrong, the more vehemently they preſs us to go forward.

Some again have ſearched, and obtained Satisfaction, they ſay, concerning every Article of Morals; but will not concern themſelves about Religion. Yet ſurely the Inquiry, whether

there be a wise and just Ruler of this Universe or not; and if there be, what Homage he expects from us; and what we have to hope or fear from him, according as we pay it, or refuse it; is as material a one, as ever was made. And on what Pretence any one can doubt whether it be worth making, and reverently too, it is impossible to say.

Another Sort declare, that they have a settled Conviction of natural Religion, (would God they would ask their Hearts, what Feelings of it they cultivate, what marks of it they shew,) but treat Revelation at the same Time, as totally unworthy of being considered. Yet that our heavenly Father can give us very useful Information both of what we did not know before, and of what we could not know else, is at least as credible, as it is certain that we can give such one to another. And that he may with Justice give some Men greater Advantages than others by supernatural Discoveries, is no less clear, than that he may give them such Advantages by their natural Abilities and Circumstances. If then God may do this for us, it is a most interesting Question, whether he hath or not; and an indispensable Precept, which the Words, immediately

preceding the Text, expreſs when joined with it. *Deſpiſe not Prophecyings: prove all Things.*

But there is yet a different Set of Perſons, who confeſs, that both our Attention, and our Aſſent, are due to Chriſtianity in general, but who are againſt diſcuſſing any of its Doctrines in particular. Provided Men know but enough of it, to keep them well-behaved and quiet, nothing further, they conceive, is needful: whatever Sentiments about ſpeculative Points happen to prevail, ſhould be ſupported, and no Diſputes allowed to break in upon the Peace of the World. Now it is very true, that Society ſhould not be diſturbed by Contentions about Opinions, as it hath often been moſt dreadfully: nor Men be perplexed about Queſtions of mere Curioſity, inſtead of learning better Things; nor frightened, or eſtranged from each other by laying Streſs on Points of mere Nicety. And the New Teſtament ſtrongly forbids all theſe Things. But ſtill, if the Chriſtian Religion be from Heaven, it cannot be a Matter of Indifference, what its real Doctrines are: nor can its Author have given us the Liberty of profeſſing others in their Stead. Some of them may ſeem, and perhaps may be, though that doth not follow, of ſmall Conſequence

ſequence to the Purpoſes of common Life: but if they convey to us juſt Notions of God, and of thoſe Relations of ours to him, which are never the leſs real for not being diſcoverable by Reaſon; if they inſtruct us in the Duties, which thoſe Relations require, and form us to that State of Mind, which he knows to be requiſite for enjoying the Happineſs of another World, be their Connexion with this World ever ſo little, ſurely they are important enough. Some of them alſo have Doubts and Difficulties attending them; as even the Doctrines of natural Religion, and the Duties of Morality have: but theſe were intended to furniſh us with Opportunities of ſhewing Uprightneſs in judging where we are qualified to judge; and Humility in ſubmitting our ſhallow Imaginations to unfathomable Wiſdom, where we are not: the Exerciſe of which Virtues here will fit us for a plentiful Reward hereafter. And would Men but once prevail on themſelves to expreſs their Thoughts on controverted Subjects with Decency and Candour: Society, inſtead of ſuffering by Debates, would receive much Benefit. Chriſtianity would be better underſtood; and therefore more juſtly eſteemed, and more diſcreetly practiſed: it would be

built on firmer Foundations, and therefore be securer against all Assaults.

There still remains a large Number of Christians, I mean the Advocates of the Church of *Rome*, who are indeed by no Means indifferent what Doctrines are held, but vehemently oppose entering into any Disquisitions about them; and would have us, instead of that, first look out for an infallible Guide, and then follow him blindfold. But they have never been able to shew, that such Infallibility exists amongst Men; or even to agree with each other determinately, in whom they should place it. And the Scripture, far from directing us to examine this one Claim, and after that never to examine more, directs us in many Places, but particularly in the Text, by as plain Words as can be written, to *prove*, that is, examine, *all Things*. But were this otherwise, their Pretension will require no long Examination: for it is in vain to argue that such or such Men cannot mistake, when it notoriously appears in Fact, that they have mistaken.

Every Article therefore both of Morals and Religion may and ought to be tried, in such Manner as can be reasonably expected from the Parts, Attainments and Circumstances of each

each Person: and concerning this, we should both judge modestly for ourselves, and consult others with Deference. For attempting too much will be more likely to mislead, than improve us.

But then the more general and important this Duty of Inquiry is, the more Care must be taken to perform it aright. For many pique themselves on a most unbounded Zeal for Freedom of Thought, and a thorough Search into Things, who yet by no Means deserve the Character which they assume.

Some of them fancy they have thought very freely upon Religion. Now this is, in one Sense, treating it freely indeed, but no Proof of thinking upon it at all. For mere disbelieving is no more an Evidence of having examined, than mere believing is. However, at least, they say, they have thrown off the Prejudices, in which they were bred up: and throwing off Prejudices must be right. But then they are many of them for extirpating, under that odious Name, original natural Dispositions in the Heart of Man. For Instance: the Propensity, that we all experience to revere an invisible Power; the esteem that we all feel of Justice and Truth, of Mercy and Good-

Goodneſs, of Honour and Decency; are as real Conſtituents of our inward Frame, as any Paſſion or Appetite, that belongs to it. Yet theſe Principles, which direct us to every Thing that is good, they would perſuade us to root out as Prejudices; while they plead earneſtly for the Inclinations, that continually prompt us to Vice, as Dictates of Nature. And a Part of our Nature undoubtedly they are: but a Part lamentably diſordered; and which, in its beſt Eſtate, the other and higher was evidently deſigned to govern and reſtrain. At leaſt, to ſet out with taking the contrary for granted; and condemn Things at once, as groundleſs Prepoſſeſſions, which have ſo reſpectable an Appearance of being the primitive Guides of Life, is by no Means inquiring freely.

Another falſe Notion concerning Prejudices, though at firſt Sight a plauſible one, is, that we ought to diveſt ourſelves of all Deſire to find Religion true, before we go about to judge of it. Now it is impoſſible, that a Perſon of a worthy Mind ſhould do ſo. He may indeed, and will take Care, not to be miſled by his Deſire. But he neither can, nor ought to be indifferent concerning a Point, on which his own eternal Happineſs, and that of every good Man

upon

upon Earth, depends. Nor is this the only Caſe, far from it, in which we are bound to wiſh on one Side, and yet determine fairly between both. In judicial Proceedings, a benevolent Magiſtrate will conſtantly wiſh, that whoever is accuſed before him may prove innocent: notwithſtanding which, he will try his Cauſe with the moſt upright Impartiality.

But if this Degree of Prepoſſeſſion in Favour of Religion be right, how exceedingly wrong muſt Prepoſſeſſion againſt it be! What are we to think of thoſe, and what have they Cauſe to think of themſelves, who can take Pleaſure in that comfortleſs and horrid View of Things, which Infidelity gives; and triumph in believing, that *there is* no *Reward for the Righteous*, no *God that judgeth the Earth*[a]! One would hope they do not ſee diſtinctly, and yet it is exceedingly viſible, what Malevolence to Human Kind rejoicing in a Thought of this Nature implies.

Or if they do not wiſh againſt Religion in general, yet, if they wiſh againſt the Chriſtian Religion, they are Enemies to a Doctrine, which confirms very powerfully all the great Truths that Reaſon teaches; which clears up,

[a] Pſalm lviii. 10.

intirely

intirely to our Advantage, many tormenting Doubts, that Reaſon leaves us involved in; and which, however it may have been perverted, (as every good Thing in the World hath) undeniably is in its Nature an Inſtitution the moſt completely fitted to make Men happy in themſelves and one another, in the preſent State and the future, that ever was. Did we then ſee thoſe, who profeſs themſelves unſatisfied about its Evidence, afraid it was inſufficient; grieved that the Proofs appeared no ſtronger, and the Objections ſo conſiderable; this would ſhew a Mind, which the Scripture calls *noble*[b], *not far from the Kingdom of God*[c]. And at Times, they moſt of them affect to ſeem thus diſpoſed; and will aſſure ſuch as preſs them upon the Subject, that, of all Things, they wiſh they could but be ſo happy as to believe. But why then were they in ſuch Haſte to diſbelieve, and moſt of them to act viciouſly upon their Diſbelief? Why would they not hear and conſider firſt? Why will they not now reconſider the Subject, and acquaint themſelves with the Defences of our Faith, as well as the Attacks made upon it? Why do they delight in making Converts of all that they can? Why are they ſo prone to ridicule,

[b] Acts xvii. 2. [c] Mark xii. 34.

or

or calumniate those, whom they cannot? Such Symptoms look very suspicious; and should induce those, who are conscious of them, to put the Question home to themselves, whether this great good Will to Religion be really the Temper, with which they have ever enquired into it, or do now inwardly think of it; or whether indeed their Professions are only a specious Manner of talking, occasionally taken up to serve a Turn. If the latter be the Case, they must, in order to be fair Doubters, guard against another Sort of Prejudices, than they imagined.

Some Prejudices, either right or wrong, will take hold of us very soon. And therefore it is fit, that as far as we can, we should examine the Foundation of our early Opinions; but with Equity, with Candour, not with a Resolution beforehand to find Fault: for as they are never the truer for our being educated in them, they are never the falser either. But indeed the Education of many hath placed them so very little in the Way, either of receiving Prejudices, or hearing Arguments in Favour of Religion; that they have Need to begin with throwing off Prejudices to its Disadvantage; and should suspect that much more may be said for it, than the little, which hath come to their Knowledge.

It

It is probable, that they might have ſome Impreſſions of Piety, ſuch as they were, made upon them by the Superintendants of their Childhood; and it is poſſible, that ſomething may have been added ſince to theſe Impreſſions, by their Attendance, if haply they have been ſuffered to attend, on public Inſtruction. But as ſoon as they begin to ſee a little more of the World, and obſerve what paſſes around them, what a Number of Things will they meet with, likely to give them a much ſtronger Bias towards Infidelity, than the Forms of a common Education have given them towards Faith! They will find but too many declared Unbelievers, and even Teachers of Unbelief: very many, who, if they do not expreſſly deny Chriſtianity, ſpeak and act as if they deſpiſed it; and few, in Compariſon, that vouchſafe it a ſerious and uniform Regard. The Abuſes of Religion they will hear moſt invidiouſly magnified; the Benefits of it moſt artfully and maliciouſly depreciated; the public Worſhip of God condemned, as idle Formality; the private, as enthuſiaſtic Folly; the Miniſters of his Word repreſented as Objects only of Contempt or Abhorrence: and the Conſequence hath been, that, by thinking of us in a Manner, which, with all our Faults, God forbid we ſhould

ſhould deſerve, Multitudes are come to think of the Goſpel, that we preach, in a Manner, which they certainly ought not, did we deſerve ever ſo ill. When Prejudices from without like theſe, are added to the vehement ones within, which Vanity forms againſt every Thing that would humble it, and Paſſions and Appetites againſt every Thing that would reſtrain them; it is eaſy to perceive, where the Danger of Partiality lies; and what Prepoſſeſſions the Company they have kept, the Books they have read, the Lives they have led, make neceſſary to be baniſhed by too many, if they would become fair Enquirers.

Let it therefore be examined, on what Foundation the Notions, that we have learned, of Religion and Virtue ſtand. But let it be examined alſo, on what Foundation the prevailing Notions, which contradict Religion and Virtue ſtand. For to lay it down as a Maxim, that theſe are well grounded, and diſcard the former merely on that Preſumption, is monſtrouſly unreaſonable. We own it to be highly proper, that Men ſhould aſk themſelves, why they believe: but it is equally proper for them to aſk, why they diſbelieve. Undoubtedly they ſhould not be Bigots and Zealots:

lots: but then they should not be so against Religion, any more than for it. Implicit Faith is wrong: but implicit Infidelity is yet more so. And whatever Fault may be found with the Trust, which it is said the godly repose in their spiritual Guides; it is full as possible, and perhaps in Proportion full as frequent, for the ungodly to follow one another on to their Lives End, with their Eyes close shut, each in the most servile Reliance on what his Leader tells him; only with the ridiculous Addition of admiring most immoderately, all the Way, their own wonderful Freedom of Thought.

By such Considerations as these, Men should prepare their Minds for beginning to inquire. And when they do begin, it is an important Rule, not to be too hasty in drawing Conclusions, especially bold ones. Viewing Things on every Side, observing how far Consequences reach, and proceeding to collect and hear Evidence, till Reason saith there needs no more, is grievous Labour to Indolence and Impatience, and by no Means answers the Ends of Conceit and Affectation. A shorter Way therefore is commonly taken. Some Objection of minute Philosophy strikes their Thoughts unexpectedly or comes recommended to them as highly fashi-

onable: and whether a ſolid Anſwer can be given to it, they never aſk. Some Argument, urged in Favour of Religion, proves or ſeems to be a weak one: and, without more ado, they infer, that the reſt are no ſtronger. Some Things, which have been generally received, they find or apprehend are falſe or doubtful; and therefore Nothing, they imagine, is certain. Some Text of Scripture, poſſibly tranſcribed or tranſlated amiſs, is hard to defend, or to reconcile with ſome other; and therefore they ſlight the Whole. Some Doctrine, which Revelation is ſaid to teach, appears hard to underſtand or admit, or is capable of a ludicrous Turn: and therefore immediately they reject, not only that, but others not in the leaſt connected with it; throw aſide at once the intire Syſtem; and, it may be, plunge headlong into Vice. Yet, all the while, Revelation perhaps doth not teach this Doctrine, and they are offended ſolely at a Phantom of their own dreſſing up; or perhaps teaches it with great Reaſon, for any Thing which they can ever prove to the contrary. For in a Nature ſo unſearchable as that of God, and a Scheme ſo vaſt as that of his univerſal Government, there muſt be many Things, which Creatures of our

limited Faculties cannot approach towards comprehending; and, merely for Want of comprehending, may fancy to be full of Incredibilities, which, could we but know more, or would we but remember that we know ſo little, would inſtantly vaniſh. In Matters therefore, which we underſtand ſo very imperfectly, to ſet up human Imagination againſt divine Authority; to rely on crude Notions, that Things are impoſſible, which proper Teſtimony ſhews to be true in Fact; or that God cannot be, or do, what, by his own Declarations, he is, and hath done, betrays a Diſpoſition widely diſtant from the Modeſty which becomes us.

Beſides, were the Difficulties which attend the Syſtem of Religion, more conſiderable than they are; yet we ſhould take Notice, that Difficulties attend the contrary Syſtem alſo; and conſider, ſince one muſt be true, which is moſt likely to be ſo. If there be Objections againſt a Creation and a Providence; are there not greater againſt ſuppoſing, that the World could have exiſted without being created, or continue all this Time without a Providence? If there be ſomewhat ſcarce conceivable in the Doctrine of a future Life and Judgement: yet upon the Whole, which of the two is moſt probable,

probable, that a wiſe and good God will finally recompenſe Men according to their Works, or that he will not? If there be Things in the Goſpel-Revelation, for which it is hard to account, is it ſo hard to account for any Thing upon Earth, as how it ſhould come to have ſuch aſtoniſhing Proofs, internal and external, of being true, if it be really falſe? They who think the Creed of a Chriſtian ſo ſtrange and myſterious, let them think a while, what the Creed of an Infidel muſt be, if he would only lay aſide his general Pretences of Impoſture and Enthuſiaſm and Credulity and Bigotry, which thrown out at random will diſcredit all Evidence of Hiſtory alike; and anſwer in particular, how, on his own Hypotheſis, he accounts for all the ſeveral notorious Facts, on which our Religion is built. I am perſuaded, there hath never appeared yet amongſt Men ſo incomprehenſible a Collection of Tenets, as this would produce. Men may indeed be too eaſy of Belief: but it is juſt as great a Weakneſs to be too full of Suſpicion. Reverence for Antiquity may impoſe upon us: but Fondneſs for Novelty may do the ſame Thing. Undoubtedly we ſhould be on the Watch againſt pious Frauds: but againſt impious ones too. For

whatever Dishonesty the Advocates of Religion have been either justly or unjustly charged with, the Opposers of it have given full Proof, at least of their Inclination not to come short of them. Whoever therefore would proceed in the right Path, must be attentive to the Dangers on each Side.

Perhaps this may seem to require more Pains than most Persons are capable of. But of an upright Disposition every one is capable: and with this, common Abilities and Leisure will suffice to judge concerning the necessary Points of Faith and Practice. Few indeed, or none, can judge of any Thing without relying in some Measure on the Knowledge and Veracity of others. And what must we think of human Nature, or what will become of human Society, if we can take Nothing on each other's Word? We should hearken to no one indeed, who asserts plain Absurdities. And we should always judge for ourselves as far as we can. But we should not affect to do it farther. Where we visibly want, either Parts or Learning or Time for it, as we frequently do in worldly Affairs of great Moment, no less than in Religion; we are both allowed and obliged to depend on others. Only we must observe

these

theſe two Directions: that we firſt pay a due Reſpect to that legal Authority, under which Providence hath placed us: and then chuſe, according to the beſt of our Underſtandings, the worthieſt and wiſeſt and moſt conſiderate Perſons to be our Conductors. For as we ſhould never haſtily run after uncommiſſioned Guides, ſo above all Things we ſhould beware of artful or ſelf-ſufficient, of raſh and impetuous ones: which laſt, however it happens, Men are peculiarly apt to follow, though almoſt ſure of being led by them, not only wrong, but great Lengths in what is wrong: whereas there are no plainer Rules of Behaviour than theſe, that in Proportion as we are in the Dark, we ſhould go on gently: and whenever there may be Hazard, keep on the ſafer Side.

He that will conduct himſelf thus, may ſoon make large Advances in religious Knowledge: and wherever he ſtops, needs not be uneaſy. Though the Arguments, which he hath for his Faith, may not be the ſtrongeſt: yet a *Tree*, but weakly rooted, often *brings forth good Fruit*; and if it doth, will never *be hewn down, and caſt into the Fire*[d]. Though he may

[d] Matth. iii. 10. vii. 19.

be ignorant of many Things, and doubt or even err concerning many others, yet they may be of ſmall Importance: or, though of great, yet having uſed a competent Care to inform himſelf, he will obtain Pardon. We cannot indeed ſay with Exactneſs, how much of their Time and Pains Men are bound to ſpend upon Examination, any more than how much of their Wealth in Works of Charity: and the leſs, as both Duties vary according to the Circumſtances of every Individual. But let each conſult his Conſcience, with a ſerious Deſire of being told the Truth, whether it hath been, and is now, his habitual Endeavour to determine and to act as rightly as he can: and, if the Anſwer be clearly in his Favour, when he is neither diſpoſed to frighten nor flatter himſelf, let him truſt in God, *and be at Peace*[e]. For *like as a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him*[f].

Not that, after all, it is indifferent, whether we fall into Errors concerning Religion, or eſcape them. For both Miſtakes and bare Ignorance, where they are accompanied with little or no Guilt, may often be followed by great Diſadvantages. Wrong Notions in the

[e] Job xxii. 21. [f] Pſal. ciii. 13.

Under-

Underſtanding may produce wrong Movements in the Heart; which, even when they will not bring down upon us future Puniſhment, may unfit us for certain Degrees of future Reward. And, on the contrary, a larger Portion of Piety and Virtue, and therefore of heavenly Felicity, may prove to be the natural Conſequence of a more extenſive Acquaintance with Goſpel Truths. So that, in the Reaſon of Things, as well as the ſure Foundation of divine Promiſes, good Chriſtians are intitled to expect thoſe diſtinguiſhed Glories in a better World, for which, others, though, in Proportion to their Talents, truly good, may not be qualified.

But ſtill it is allowable to hope, and to rejoice in hoping, that a Being unſpeakably gracious will confer ſome Meaſure of Happineſs hereafter on all the Sons of Men, who have not made themſelves incapable of it; and that neither involuntary nor excuſable Miſapprehenſions will exclude any from it. If indeed, under Colour of reaſoning freely, Men will argue fallaciouſly, conclude precipitately, and behave preſumptuouſly; talk and do what they pleaſe without Modeſty or Fear; and ſet themſelves up, on this Merit, for the only Aſſertors

of Liberty, when in Truth they are willing Slaves to a wicked Mind; these, of all Men, *have no Cloke for their Sin*[g]. But the virtuous and humble Inquirer, who studies to conduct his Understanding with impartial Care first, and his Life with inoffensive Sincerity afterwards, yet, conscious of his many Failings, begs for Pardon and Strength to be given him in such Manner as his Maker sees fit, may surely comfort himself with pleasing Expectations of Acceptance after Death. *As many* therefore, *as walk according to this Rule, Peace be on them, and Mercy, and upon the Israel of God*[h].

[g] John xv. 22. [h] Gal. vi. 16.

SERMON II.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all Appearance of Evil.

THE first Duty of reasonable Creatures, with Respect to Religion, is, informing themselves, as fully as their natural Abilities, their Improvements in Knowledge, and their Condition of Life permit, concerning its Truth, and the Doctrines it teaches. Multitudes are unable to proceed far in this Inquiry: of the rest, some totally neglect it, some carry it on with less Care and Integrity, or fewer Advantages, than others. And hence it comes to pass, that different Persons think upon the Subject in very different Manners: and even the same Person, in Progress of Time, very differently from himself. But then every State of Mind, that Men can be in, relative to these Matters, hath its proper Obligations belonging to it: and, for Want of paying due Re-

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gard to them, they whoſe Opinions are right may be very bad in their Practice; and they whoſe Opinions are wrong, much worſe, than even their own Notions, by any juſt Conſequence, allow them to be. Not uncommonly indeed the Goodneſs of Mens Nature prevails, through God's Mercy, in ſome Points, over the ill Tendency of their Principles; and makes them better, than they profeſs themſelves. But much oftener they run into ſuch Behaviour, as muſt be unwarrantable, according to the very Doctrines, which they have embraced. And therefore every one ſhould conſider well, to what Sort of Conduct theſe really direct him, and from what they reſtrain him. Men may think, they could not help being of the Opinions they are: but if they take ſtill greater Liberties, than their Opinions lead them to; inſtead of ſuſpecting, that poſſibly they may lead them too far: this they muſt know to be their own Fault; and, while they indulge it, one doth not ſee, what they will ſtop at: whereas keeping carefully within the Bounds, which their Judgement ſets them, will be the beſt Excuſe they can have, in their preſent Way of thinking, and the likelieſt Means of diſcerning and amending the Errors of it.

Having

Having therefore laid before you, in the firſt Place, the Duty of *proving all Things*, and the general Diſpoſition of Mind, with which it ſhould be done: I proceed now to the conſequent Duty, of *holding faſt that which is good*, and *abſtaining from all Appearance of Evil*. And as the Appearances of Good and Evil muſt vary, according to the Notions, which are eſpouſed about them; it will be uſeful to conſider thoſe of Unbelievers, as well as Believers: for which Purpoſe, there muſt be ſome extraordinary Suppoſitions made: but I hope the truly pious will neither think them ſhocking, nor uſeleſs; being introduced only for the Sake of ſuggeſting to them ſuch Things, as though they want not for themſelves, or for others like them, they may perhaps employ to good Effect for convincing or ſilencing Infidels and Libertines, when Occaſion requires: and there hath ſeldom been more Occaſion, than at preſent.

To begin then with imagining a worſe Caſe, than perhaps is poſſible. Were any one perſuaded, not only that all Religion is groundleſs, but that Virtue and Vice, Right and Wrong, are mere Words without Meaning: yet even ſuch a one, if he did not think Wiſdom and Folly, Pleaſure and Pain, empty Sounds

too;

too; would have some Rule of Conduct, so far as it reached. Still it would be Matter of serious Consideration, what Behaviour promises the most Happiness, upon the Whole, to such Beings, placed in such a World, as we are. And our present Interest here, had we no other Guide, far from permitting us to do every mad Thing, that Passion, Appetites or Fancies, prompt us to, would direct us, in a great Measure, to a Course of Honesty, Friendliness and Sobriety. For not only Life and Health, and Safety and Quiet; of which no other Method can possibly give us, in general, near so good a Prospect; are of much too high Importance, to be hazarded wantonly: but Reputation also is a Matter of no small Value; and Peace within of greater still. Now suppose there were no Reason in the least for any one to feel Satisfaction in doing good-natured and just Things, or Uneasiness from the Reflection of having done cruel and base ones; yet, as in Fact, almost, if not absolutely, all Persons do feel both; to aim at the former, and avoid the latter, is, with Regard to Principle, a Dictate of common Prudence.

But farther, whatever some may think of moral Obligation themselves, they have many

Reasons

Reaſons to deſire, that the World about them ſhould think highly of it. For though Diſcretion, abſtracted from Senſe of Duty, might reaſonably, in moſt Caſes, reſtrain thoſe, with whom we are concerned, from uſing us ill; yet it will reſtrain them but in few Inſtances; and then very imperfectly. So that whoever is conſiderate, will be extremely unwilling to weaken the Bonds of human Society: which he will find, at beſt, are by no Means too ſtrong. And therefore, ſhould he think it his own Intereſt to be wicked; yet, if he be wiſe, he will never attempt to make one ſingle Perſon like him, beſides thoſe whom he abſolutely needs for Aſſociates: and even of ſuch he will beware: for he hath *taught them an evil Leſſon againſt himſelf* [a]. But ſpreading his Opinions farther, he will look on as the ſillieſt of Vanities: and be earneſtly deſirous, that others ſhould act upon Principle, whatever he doth himſelf: that his Friends ſhould be faithful and affectionate, his Servants honeſt and careful, his Children dutiful and regular. And they, who, in the fancied Superiority of their Knowledge, teach thoſe about them, or thoſe with whom they converſe, to be profli-

[a] Ecclus ix. 1.

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gate; by expreſſing, either deſignedly or careleſly, a Contempt of Virtue; well deſerve the Return, they often meet with, for ſuch Inſtructions.

Nay indeed every prudent Man, be his private Way of thinking ever ſo bad, will be ſolicitous to preſerve in the World, not only Morals; but, for the ſake of Morals, what is the main Support of them, Religion too: and that Religion, which is the likelieſt to ſupport them. Though he conceive it to be falſe, he will reſpect it as beneficial. Were he to imagine this or that Part of it hurtful; he would ſtill moderate his Zeal againſt them, ſo as not to deſtroy the Influence of the reſt. For if believing ſome Things may do Harm in the World, believing others may do Good. And if any Thing whatever can do much Good, and no Harm: it is the Perſuaſion, that we live continually under the Eye of an infinitely powerful and wiſe, juſt and good Ruler; who hath ſent us a Perſon of inconceivable Dignity, on Purpoſe to give us the fulleſt Aſſurance of his rewarding all, who ſhall repent and amend, and puniſhing all who continue in Wickedneſs, both here and to Eternity. To do or ſay what may weaken the Im-

impressions of such a Doctrine, must, on all Suppositions, be the grossest Folly. And yet some, who have the highest Opinion of their own Understandings, are perpetually guilty of it: and seem not to discern, how impossible it is, that the World should ever be influenced, to any good Purpose, by what the daily Conversation and Example of those, who are likely to be reckoned the more knowing Part of the World, encourage the rest to despise.

But I dwell too long on the Supposition that Men can be absolutely persuaded, that Religion and Virtue are Nothing. For though many have wished, and some said it, when the Wickedness of their Lives hath driven them to that Refuge: and though others may have been led, by Love of Singularity, or Indignation against reigning Superstitions, to advance the same Notion: yet neither their Numbers, nor their Abilities, have been comparatively at all considerable: and besides, few of them appear to have thoroughly convinced themselves, at least for any Time, of what they affirmed: nor is there Pretence of Ground for such Conviction to rest on. Doubts indeed may be raised, such as they are. And therefore let us consider, in the second Place, the

Obliga-

Obligations of thoſe, who are doubtful about theſe Matters. Now Uncertainty, as it implies an Apprehenſion, that they may not be true; implies alſo an Apprehenſion, that they may. And the loweſt Degree of Likelihood, the very Poſſibility, that God is, and that Virtue is his Law, ſhould in all Reaſon have a powerful Influence on the Minds and Conduct of Men. Perhaps they fluctuate, only becauſe they have not taken due Pains to inform themſelves. They are ignorant; not Religion and Morals deſtitute of Proof: and inſtead of ſlighting, they ſhould ſtudy them. Or ſuppoſing, after ſome Inquiry, that they cannot determine: this happens in many Caſes, where further Inquiry affords full Evidence; concerning the main Point at leaſt, if not every Particular. But were we to remain ever ſo much at a Loſs, when we have done our beſt: not knowing Things to be true, is an exceedingly different State from knowing them to be falſe; how apt ſoever we are to confound the one with the other. In the Affairs of this World, Men may be quite in Suſpence about Matters, which yet are very important Realities: and it may be of the utmoſt Conſequence to them, whether, during that Suſ-

pence, they act rightly or not: nay, while it is ever ſo uncertain, what they are to think; it may be very clear, how they are to behave: and, by following or tranſgreſſing that Rule, they may as truly deſerve well or ill, as by any other Part of their Conduct. Why then may not the Caſe be the ſame, in Reſpect to thoſe, who have not arrived at Certainty concerning religious and moral Obligations? Why may not ſuch Doubts be one Part of the Trial of their Behaviour; as well as other Perplexities are of the Behaviour of other Perſons?

Being profane and vicious, becauſe they do not ſee clearly, is determining, inſtead of doubting: and determining on the Side, that is not only prejudicial to all around them, but dangerous to themſelves. For it is exceedingly little, were all Things well conſidered, that we can almoſt ever get by Wickedneſs: but what we may ſuffer by it, is infinite. The Fruits of it in this Life are uſually found very bitter: nor is there any Shadow of Proof, but another may ſucceed it. And if there ſhould; Innocence here cannot poſſibly hurt us hereafter: but Guilt runs a double Riſque; not only as uneaſy Reflections naturally follow it, but as farther Puniſhment may be juſtly inflicted

on it. The slightest Sense of Duty, that we can experience, should have made us at least suspect, that so peculiar a Feeling as that, is not to stand for Nothing in our Composition. And if Men will do, what they are told, by a secret Voice within, they ought not; it is fit they should take the Consequences, in the next World, as well as the present. For it is knowing they did ill, not knowing they should be condemned for it, that makes their Condemnation just. And though acute and subtle Reasoners may easily build up a specious System of Doubts and Questions; yet this is a poor Defence to rest the Whole of their Beings upon: especially as Men have so irresistible a Conviction, that Right and Wrong are Notions of great Consequence, when their own Rights are invaded; that they cannot in earnest think them idle Words, or Matters of Indifference, when their Neighbours are concerned; let them say what they will.

And therefore we may now go on to a third Supposition; that Men acknowledge the Obligation of Morals, but not of Religion; and let us consider, what they are to do. They almost universally take the Liberty of doing one very bold and wrong Thing, of most extensive bad Effect.

Effect. They model their Notions of Morals, just according to their own Fancy; and reduce them into as narrow a Compass, as they think convenient. So that, while they talk very highly of Virtue, they practise little or nothing of it: or, if they observe some Duties strictly, yet others, though, it may be, scarce of less Moment, but less agreeable to them, they neither regard, nor acknowledge, but hold them in utter Contempt. Thus one Part of the World transgresses the Rules of Sobriety and Chastity; another lives wholly to idle and expensive Amusements; a third is wickedly selfish or ill-natured in private Affairs; a fourth unreasonably vehement in public ones; and yet all contrive to overlook their own Faults in these Points, and admire their own Goodness in others: whereas to be truly good, we must be so in every Thing alike. But Inclination easily prevails over Principle, where it hath not the Sanction of Religion to strengthen it. And they, who profess Nothing beyond Morals, not only are destitute of that higher Aid; but, though their Lives fully shew how much they want it, very commonly affect a Scorn of it, no Way to be accounted for. Suppose them doubtful even

about natural Religion; they must own, that, could it be proved, Nothing in the World could influence Men to Virtue, like it. The Fear of Punishment, the Hope of Reward, from the King and Lord of all, the Consciousness of living continually in his Presence, Reverence of his perfect Holiness, Love of his infinite Goodness, Reliance on his infinite Wisdom and Power, are evidently the strongest Motives to right Behaviour in every Station, that can be proposed. They must own too, that the most thoughtful and able Men in all Ages, have held these Motives to be well grounded; that the Proofs in Favour of them have considerable Appearances of being conclusive: and, had they none, it would furnish no Cause of Triumph, but of the deepest Concern to every Lover of Virtue. Such a one therefore, however uncertain, will abhor the Thought of treating so beneficial, so respectable a Doctrine with Contempt and Ridicule: a shocking Manner, which frivolous and wrong Minds are strangely fond of, on many unfit Occasions: and indulging it, throughly misleads them from good Sense and discreet Conduct, in every other Article of Life, as well as this. On the contrary, the slightest Apprehension,

that there only may be a juſt Ruler and Judge of the World, will give every well-diſpoſed Perſon great Seriouſneſs of Heart in thinking upon theſe Subjects, and great Decency in ſpeaking of them: will incline him to ſeek for, and pay Regard to, any Degree of farther Evidence concerning them, that is real, though perhaps it falls very ſhort of what he could wiſh: and will engage him, in the mean Time, to behave with all the Caution, that becomes his preſent Situation. For, in a Caſe of ſuch Importance, even ſmall Suſpicions ought to lay us under no ſmall Reſtraints. Therefore he will let Nothing ever eſcape him, which may induce others to throw off what he only doubts of: he will never ſolicit them to tranſgreſs the Precepts of Religion, while they acknowledge its Authority: (Things palpably wicked, and yet commonly done:) he will much more diſcourage a groundleſs Neglect, than a groundleſs Belief and Practice, of it: and he will think himſelf bound to act thus, not in Prudence only, as even Men of no Principle are, but in Conſcience alſo.

These then are the Duties of ſuch, if any ſuch there be, as admit the Reality of Virtue, and are doubtful concerning any Thing farther.

But indeed the Generality of Men profess to go so much farther, as to believe in natural Religion, whatever they may think of Christianity. Let us therefore consider, in the fourth Place, what their Obligations are. And we shall find an Addition of very considerable ones incumbent on them, if they deserve the Title they assume, that of Deists: in which Word, according to its original Import, Regard to the Deity is principally, if not solely, expressed. But notwithstanding this, it hath now for a long Time signified much more determinately, that Men do not believe in Christ, than that they do believe in God. At least, the Belief of some, who would take it exceedingly ill to be called by a worse Name, amounts to little more, than a general confused Persuasion of some Sort of first Cause; probably an intelligent, perhaps a beneficent one too: but with scarce any distinct Conception of his being the moral Governor of the World; much less any serious Conviction, that he expects from us a Temper and Conduct of Piety and Virtue, as the only Condition and Means of our obtaining Happiness and avoiding Misery. Now if their Faith comes short of this, they may very nearly as well have none at all: and if it comes up to

this, it binds them indiſpenſably to be very different in their Practice, from what they too commonly are: to cultivate in their Hearts that Fear and Love, which the Greatneſs and the Goodneſs of God require: to pay him outwardly that Homage and Worſhip, which our compound Frame and the Intereſts of Society call for: to beg of him both Light to diſcern Truth, and Strength to practiſe it: to make diligent and upright Inquiry, what Rules he hath pointed out for the Conduct of Man: to obſerve them all with the ſtricteſt Care, however contrary to favourite Inclinations: and to endeavour, as far as their Influence reaches, that others alſo may feel and expreſs the ſame deep Senſe of what they owe their Maker. Theſe are evident Duties of real Believers in him: do they perform them? They talk in the higheſt Terms of the Sufficiency of Reaſon, and the Clearneſs with which natural Light teaches every Thing needful: doth it *teach them to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly* [b]? It is but too eaſy for them to excell, in this Reſpect, the Generality of ſuch, as claim the Title of Chriſtians. Why will they not take ſo honourable a Method of putting us, and our

[b] Tit. ii. 12.

Profession, out of Countenance? They apprehend themselves perhaps to have been far more strict and careful than we, in forming their Opinions: why will they not manifest a proportionable Strictness in regulating their Practice too? That would be a powerful Evidence, both to the World and their own Hearts, that they are sincere in their Pretensions: that they do not reject the Doctrines of the Gospel, merely to be excused from the Duties of it: nor disown every other Law of Life, but one within them, that they may be tied to Nothing, which they do not like. It would be uncharitable indeed to accuse them of this, without Proof: but they would do well to examine, whether they are not guilty of it. For it is a dangerous Temptation: and one Thing looks peculiarly suspicious in many of them; that they have so little or no Zeal for natural Religion, and so vehement a Zeal against revealed. Surely every one, who inwardly honours God, must be affected quite otherwise: and think both his Conscience, and his Character concerned in shewing the warmest Attachment to the former, and the mildest Equity in Relation to the latter. If he not only suspected, but imagined he knew the Scripture-Scheme to

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be falſe, ſtill he muſt own it to be a Falſehood with the moſt amazing Quantity of Truth in it, that ever was: to give Men, however it happens, beyond Compariſon, the righteſt Notions, the juſteſt Precepts, the joyfulleſt Encouragement, both in Piety and Morals, that ever Syſtem did: and to have been *the Light of the World*[c], ſo far as appears, from the very Beginning of it. Our only Knowledge of the Exiſtence of true Religion in the earlieſt Times, is from the Diſcoveries recorded in the Bible, as made to the Patriarchs. The Jewiſh Diſpenſation afterwards was for many Ages the main Bulwark of Faith *in one God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth*: nor probably was it from any other Source, that the learned Heathens derived their chief Acquaintance with divine Truths, after they had forgotten the primitive Tradition of them. Then laſtly, the Chriſtian Revelation overturned, when every Thing elſe had appeared incapable of doing it, Polytheiſm and Idolatry, immoral Superſtition and profligate Vice, wherever it was preached: and though it was indeed perverted for a Time to patronize, in ſome Degree, what it had deſtroyed; yet, by the native

c John viii. 12.

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Goodneſs of its Conſtitution, it recovered again; and is now profeſſed by the Church, of which we are Members, in greater Purity, than elſewhere upon Earth, Infidels themſelves being Judges. If therefore they have in Truth the Affection, which they cannot deny but they ought to have, for genuine, moral, rational Piety, they muſt honour this Inſtitution, as an infinitely beneficial one; whether they confeſs it to be from Heaven, or not: and, before they even wiſh it diſregarded, ſhould conſider, with no little Seriouſneſs, what Effects muſt naturally follow. Would Men really believe the Being and Providence of God, the Obligations of Virtue, and the Recompences of another Life, the more firmly, for diſbelieving the Goſpel? Would they underſtand their Duty the better, for having no written Rule of it? Would they judge about it the more impartially for being left to make it out by their own Fancies? Would they think of it the oftener, for never being inſtructed in it? Or is there not the ſtrongeſt Appearance, that as from Chriſtianity all the true Knowledge of Religion came, which even the Enemies of Chriſtianity have to boaſt of: ſo with it, all true Regard to Religion would

be loſt again? We have been making in the preſent Age ſome Trial of this: and the Effects, in private Life and public, have been ſuch, that it is very hard to ſay, why either a good or a wiſe Man ſhould ever want to ſee, what a farther Trial would end in. But, at leaſt, ſuch a one would have much more Concern that Men ſhould believe and practiſe what Reaſon and Nature teach, than that they ſhould not believe and practiſe what Revelation teaches. And even if he could think himſelf obliged to declare againſt the latter, be the Conſequences bad as they will, for the Sake of what he imagines Truth; (which yet Unbelievers are not apt to conſider as a Point of ſuch indiſpenſable Obligation, in other Caſes;) he would however do it in a fair, an honourable, a decent Manner: never miſrepreſent, through Deſign or Negligence, the Doctrines, the Evidence, or the Teachers, of the Goſpel; never ſtudy to expoſe them to the Hatred of Men by Invectives, or to their Contempt by Ridicule: but inform himſelf about them with Care, judge of them with Candour, and ſpeak of them with good Breeding and Moderation. Widely different from this is the Conduct of our Adverſaries; who take all

Methods

Methods without Scruple to engage on their Side, the Resentments of some, the Avarice of others, the Vanity of a third Sort, the Sensuality of a fourth: and notwithstanding, are able, it seems, to pass themselves upon unwary Minds for great Lovers of free Inquiry: but, with a little Attention, *by their Fruits ye shall know them*[d]. Would God they were cool and serious enough to know themselves; and to remember, that neither Doubt nor Disbelief can ever excuse Malice or Dishonesty. Could they but bring their Hearts into such a Disposition, their Objections would soon diminish, and our Answers and Arguments appear just and conclusive. To be satisfied of this, let us take a short View of the Case of Christianity.

God may certainly inform Men of most useful Things, which they did not, and could not, else know. He may certainly bestow superior Advantages on some Ages and Nations from Motives of which we are ignorant, yet be sufficiently gracious to all. He may see Cause to reveal some Things to us very imperfectly, and yet require us to believe what he hath revealed, though we are unable to comprehend what he hath not. He may give

[d] Matth. vii, 16.

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us Commands, without adding the Reasons of them, which yet we are bound to obey: for we ourselves do the same Thing. He may appoint various Forms of Religion, suited to various Places and Times, full as properly as Men appoint various Forms of Government. Farther still, he might as justly permit us to become what we are, frail and mortal, by Means of our first Parents Transgression, as create us what we are, independently upon it. He is no less merciful in pardoning our Sins on Account of the willing Sacrifice, which he hath provided for us, than if he had pardoned them without any at all. He is no less authorized to demand of us what he will give us Power to perform, if we ask it aright; than what we had Power to perform of ourselves. And he can as easily form our Bodies anew, fitted for the Purposes of a better Life, as he could form them originally, fitted for the Purposes of this. If some Parts of his Word appear hard to be understood, of small Use, or even hurtful; many Parts of his Works appear so too. If the Revelation, which he hath given us, hath often done Harm instead of Good: the Reason and the Affections which he hath given us, have done so likewise.
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These few Considerations, (and there are many obvious ones besides, of the same Kind,) would remove out of every honest Mind most of the Prejudices raised against the Faith of Christians: which indeed, for the greatest Part, bear full as hard against the universal Providence of God, even against those Proceedings of it, which we daily experience.

Then as to the Evidence in Favour of our Religion: whatever Difficulties may be started concerning particular Points of it, taken singly; as there may, in the same Manner, concerning any Evidence in the World; yet lay together, in one View, the Scripture-Narration of Things from the Beginning; the Consistency and Connection of the Scheme, though carried on for so many thousands of Years; the admirable Temper and Character of the Author of Christianity; the Sublimity and Reasonableness of its Doctrines; the Purity and Benevolence of its Precepts; the Excellency of its Means of Improvement and Grace; the eternal and true Felicity of its Rewards; the manifold Attestations of its History and Miracles; the wonderful Propagation of it through the World, and its primitive Influence on the Souls and Lives of Men; the undeniable

deniable Completion of many of its Prophecies, and the evident Room there is left for the fulfilling of the rest: all these notorious Facts, thus united and combined, can surely never fail to convince every impartial Examiner, that the System, they support, must be from God, and that the supreme Happiness of Man is to share in its Blessings. Now the weakest Degree of such a Persuasion, far from being unworthy of Regard, because it is no stronger, ought in all Justice to produce a most inquisitive Attention to further Proof; and, in the mean Time, a conscientious Practice of what already appears credible. For, though any one's Belief exceed his Doubts but a little; yet, if it doth so at all, what prevails in his Mind ought to regulate his Conduct: and acting thus, he will soon experience his Faith to increase. Setting himself to keep the Commandments, will shew him clearly his Want of the Mercies acknowledged in the Creed: and labouring to behave suitably to his present Light, will intitle him to that gracious Promise of more, given by our blessed Lord: *If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God*[*].

[*] John vii. 17.

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The further and particular Obligations of those, who have acquired this Knowledge, and are established in the Gospel-Faith, must be the Subject of another Discourse. But the general Direction for such as are weak and less advanced, is undoubtedly that of the Apostle: *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same Thing: and, if in any Thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you* [f].

[f] Phil. iii. 16, 15.

SERMON III.

1 THESS. v. 21, 22.

Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all Appearance of Evil.

IN discoursing on these Words, I have laid before you the Duty of carefully considering our Obligations, in Respect of Piety and Morals: and acting suitably to our Convictions, on those Heads. According as our Notions of either vary, whether from our different Means of Knowledge, or different Use of them, it must be expected, that our Conduct should vary too. And yet I have shewn you, that, were it possible for Men to disbelieve the Authority both of Religion and Virtue, mere Prudence and Self-interest would put them under considerable Restraints, in Relation to each: that whoever only doubts concerning them, admits they may be true; and therefore should take the acknowledged safer Side: that

any Degree of Perſuaſion, in Favour of Virtue only, much more of natural Religion too, ſhould excite a proportionably ſerious Regard to it: and that the loweſt Apprehenſion of the Truth of Chriſtianity, (which, I hope I proved to you, though briefly, hath the cleareſt Marks of Truth upon it) greatly ſtrengthens every other Tie; and farther binds Men to inform themſelves fully about it, as ſoon as poſſible; and give it reſpectful Treatment in the mean Time.

If then even theſe Perſons are to behave thus, how are we to behave? The Doubter, nay the Infidel, is obliged to no ſmall Care of his Heart and Life: what is the Believer obliged to? We pride ourſelves on being ſuch: pity or deteſt thoſe who are not: and yet, all the while, Chriſtians who think and act otherwiſe than Chriſtians ought, may deſerve full as ill, perhaps much worſe, than they: indeed may be one chief Cauſe, that they are what they are. Leaving others therefore to the Judge of all; let us at preſent think of ourſelves: conſider, what Manner of Perſons our holy Profeſſion requires us to be; and whether we ſo obſerve its Rules, that we may juſtly hope to attain its End: eſcape *the*

Wrath to come[a], and *partake of the Glory that ſhall be revealed*[b]. Now it plainly requires,

1. That we be duly affected by the peculiar Doctrines of Chriſtianity. Many that profeſs it, and are perſuaded of its Authority, ſeem to have no Notion almoſt of its Value, or of any great Regard owing to it. They ſay, it is deſigned intirely to make Men live good Lives: and accordingly if they do but live what the World calls a good Life, the Deſign is anſwered. As for Matters of mere Faith, or even of Practice beyond this, they conceive there is little Need of being concerned about them: and thus they are very good Chriſtians in their own Opinions, with ſcarce any Thing to diſtinguiſh them from good, or perhaps even from indifferent, Heathens. In this Error, the artful Enemies of the Goſpel ſtudiouſly confirm its inconſiderate Friends. For thus, pretending by no Means to oppoſe it, but only to rectify Mens Notions about it; and making loud Complaints, if they are ſuſpected of any Thing worſe; they can deſtroy, where they gain Credit, the whole Effect of what it adds to the Religion of Nature: and induce the unwary to imagine, there is Nothing in

[a] Matth. iii. 7. Luke iii. 7. [b] 1 Pet. v. 1.

it, worth contending for, besides *those practical, social, and real Duties*, as they are pleased, by Way of Distinction, to call them, *which our Reason and Senses prescribe in common to us all*; and which therefore we may learn and observe as well without, as with the Bible; where they lie mixed with many other Things, useless, if not hurtful; and are either misrepresented by the Writers themselves, or very liable to be mistaken by us. But indeed, if the very Writers of Scripture, with the Spirit of God to assist them, misunderstood the Doctrines of Revelation; he both chose and guided them extremely ill; nor have we any possible Means of understanding those Doctrines now. And if either they or we understand them at all; our Maker expects from us the Belief of many Things undiscoverable by Reason, as Points of great Consequence to our eternal Well-being; as with good Cause he may. The Knowledge of our fallen Estate shews us our original Destination, and our present Need of Help from above. The Incarnation and Death of God's eternal Son could not be appointed by him for Purposes of small Importance: and his Word acquaints us, that Blessings of the highest Importance depend on what he hath done

done and ſuffered for us: on his Atonement and Mediation, our Title to Pardon of Sin; on the Grace of the Holy Ghoſt whom he ſent, our Ability of performing acceptable Obedience; on both, our Reſurrection to eternal Life; on our Belief of theſe Things, our Intereſt in them. If then the Goſpel be true, its peculiar Doctrines are of the utmoſt Moment: and the Duties grounded on them, which we owe to God, as the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; to his Son, as our Redeemer; to his bleſſed Spirit, as our Sanctifier; are both as real, and as weighty, as any poſſibly can be; fully equal in their Obligation, and ſuperior in their Rank, to the moſt valuable ones of human Society. They therefore who neglect them, lead very wicked, inſtead of good Lives: and they who eſteem them lowly, diſhonour the Author of them. It is true, Reaſon cannot prove them: but it doth not contradict them. They are taught in Scripture only: but they are taught there by the all-wiſe God: and he cannot have left us at Liberty to model his Revelations according to our own Fancies; admit Part, and reject Part: but we are to take the whole Plan of our Salvation, as he hath delivered it: believe it, though implicitly; and reſpect it, in

Proportion to the Streſs laid upon it by him, who muſt know. This will naturally diſpoſe us,

2. To perform the next Obligation incumbent on us: paying a due Regard to the peculiar Inſtitutions of Chriſtianity. Great Numbers appear to have ſome how perſuaded themſelves, that ſeveral Things, which they muſt acknowledge their Maker hath appointed, as the ordinary Means of heavenly Grace and ſpiritual Improvement, may notwithſtanding, nearly, if not quite, as well, be let alone. Baptiſm indeed they do practiſe: but with plain Marks of conſidering it, as a mere empty Ceremony; not, as our Saviour hath declared it [c], the expreſs and original Condition of our Claim to all the Mercies of the Goſpel-Covenant. Laying on of Hands in Confirmation, after proper Inſtruction and a perſonal Engagement to live piouſly and virtuouſly, though evidently a very affecting and uſeful Rite, and reckoned, in the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, amongſt *the Principles of the Doctrine of Chriſt* [d]; is yet deſired, in Proportion, but by few. Receiving the holy Euchariſt, though a Duty of all Chriſtians, enjoined by our bleſſed Redeemer, almoſt with his dying Words, and de-

[c] Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 5. [d] Heb. vi. 1, 2.

clared

clared by St. *Paul* to be *the Communion of his Body and Blood*[e], that is, a Participation of the Benefits of his Death; is yet, I fear, entirely omitted by moſt, practiſed by many of the reſt, very ſeldom; and by ſome, from very improper Motives: and ſuch Reaſons are pleaded for the Neglect, as have either no Weight at all, or equal Weight againſt the Hope of future Happineſs. Praying to God is a Dictate of natural, as well as revealed Religion. And yet were a great Part of you here preſent queſtioned, how conſtantly you pray in private, indeed when you prayed laſt, and whether you are careful to do it with Attention and Serioufneſs, or look on it only as a Matter of Courſe; what Anſwer muſt you give? And as for public Worſhip: how many are there, who yet call themſelves Chriſtians, that hardly ever attend it? And how do many others think and ſpeak of it? Perhaps as Matter of Curioſity and Amuſement. If they can hope for an entertaining Diſcourſe after it, they will condeſcend to come and do Homage to him, that made them, or ſeem to do it: otherwiſe they will not. Or perhaps they vouchſafe to attend it as Matter of decent Example and Propriety.

e 1 Cor. x. 16.

Accordingly in ſome Places they always go to Church; in others, never: forgetting, that the latter will be known, and will influence, full as much as the former. Or the leaſt Trifle in the World ſhall determine them, ſometimes the one Way, ſometimes the other. And both doing and omitting it they talk of, in an eaſy, gay Manner, as a Thing of no Conſequence at all. Nay, too often, it is directly pleaded, that they can ſpend their Time as well, or much better, another Way: for they know beforehand every Thing that is told them here. Now, not to inquire particularly, in what better Things, that they could not find Leiſure for elſe, thoſe Perſons actually ſpend the Time of divine Service, who tell us ſo frankly they can: poſſibly they may, ſome of them, a little over-rate their Knowledge: at leaſt, they frequently ſeem to have great Need of being reminded, if not taught: and had they none, another and higher Duty, for which we meet, is Prayer. But to this, and all other Acts of Devotion, they object, that true Devotion is in the Heart; and outward Shew is Nothing material. Why, ſo is true Loyalty, true Friendſhip, every true Virtue. But are we therefore bound to give no external Demonſtration of

them?

them? At that Rate, what would they be worth, and how long would they last? God indeed doth not want such Demonstrations: but we want them, to keep alive our Sense of Duty to him: the World around us wants them, to spread a like Sense amongst others: and, were the Benefits of his Institutions much less evident than they are; still they are his, and we may be sure he hath Reason for them. A good Subject will go beyond, rather than come short of, what the Laws require, in paying Honour to his Prince. A penitent Criminal will not fail to sue out and plead his Pardon in due Form, let Forms, in themselves, be Things ever so insignificant: if he did, purposely or negligently, he would well deserve to forfeit it. Every Man of common Prudence, on whom, or his Family, any Thing valuable is bestowed on certain Conditions, will think it of Consequence, to qualify himself, or them, according to those Conditions, whether he sees the particular Use of them or not. If then we think such Behaviour necessary in all temporal Concerns, why not in spiritual? God is our King, and hath prescribed to us the Manner of doing him Homage. He is our Judge, and hath directed us to the Me-

thod of eſcaping Puniſhment. He is our gracious Benefactor, and hath notified to us the Means of obtaining his Favours. Why ſhall any one Thing, thus ordered by him, and therefore undoubtedly ordered in Wiſdom, be either omitted, or obſerved with Contempt? Surely this is by no Means the Spirit, with which Sinners ought to receive a Tender of Forgiveneſs; and Mortals, of eternal Life. The Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* directs the firſt Chriſtians, even in the Midſt of Perſecution, *not to forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together*, which comprehends every public Office of Religion; and laments, that *the Manner of ſome was* to do otherwiſe[f]. How guilty then muſt they be, who are now of this Number; or put on the Appearance of deſpiſing the Ordinances of Chriſt, at the ſame Time that they uſe them; and, though really, to ſome Degree, ſerious in them, are afraid of being thought ſo! But this leads me,

3. To a farther Obligation we are under, which is to profeſs our Regard, both for the Doctrines and the Inſtitutions of the Goſpel, openly and boldly, on all fit Occaſions. It is a Reproach, I believe, peculiar to the Chriſtians

f Heb. x. 25.

of this Age and Nation, that many of them ſeem aſhamed of their Chriſtianity: would not perhaps be ſaid to have thrown it aſide, yet would by no Means be imagined much in earneſt about it: and therefore ſtudy, if poſſible, to conceal their Way of thinking: or, when they are attacked upon it, excuſe their Piety, as others do their Vices, with a Sort of laughing half Defence; and ſhift off the Subject, as well and as ſoon as they can. A moſt aſtoniſhing Treatment of what our eternal Happineſs depends on: eſpecially when our Saviour expreſsly requires us to *confeſs him before Men*, as ever we expect, that he ſhould *confeſs us before his Father, which is in Heaven*[g]. It is not meant, that we ſhould be affectedly forward in talking of our Religion; but, whenever we are called to do ſo, unaffectedly own it, and ſtand by it. In ſuch a Caſe, Diſſimulation, or even Reſerve, is a mean-ſpirited Deſertion of the worthieſt Cauſe in the World: and the Words of the holy Jeſus on another Occaſion are juſtly applicable to this, that *he, who is not for him, is againſt him*[h]. Whoever is unwilling to be taken for a pious and good Man, runs a great Riſque of ſoon becoming a

[g] Matt. x. 32. [h] Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

profane

profane and bad one. Open Profession would have restrained him from doing wrong, and others from tempting him: whereas a timorous Concealment exposes him both Ways. At least, it gives the irreligious a Pretence for saying and imagining, either that every one thinks as they do, or that no one can defend thinking otherwise: and deprives those, who are better disposed, of a very animating and needful Support. For no Inticement to neglect our Duty is so dangerous, as the Appearance of a general Neglect: nor any Persecution so effectual, as that of public Scorn. Therefore we should combine to shelter one another from it: declare frankly and with Spirit, in our private Conversation, as well as by our Attendance here, what Side we are of: not be afraid of a little, perhaps only seeming, Contempt from those, who are the justest Objects of Pity themselves; but be willing *to suffer the Affliction* of Shame, amongst others, if it must be so, *with the People of God*[1]: the Number of whom is not yet become so small, or so destitute of able Advocates, but that, would they unite for that End, they might abundantly keep each other in Countenance, and their

[1] Heb. xi. 25.

Adverſaries in Awe. We have every poſſible Reaſon to be zealous in our Cauſe. Unbelievers have no ſingle good one to be ſo in theirs. Yet they are active, and we are remiſs: and what will this end in, unleſs we change our Conduct? But then if we do, there is a

4th, Moſt important Obligation incumbent on us, that of tempering our Zeal with Mildneſs and Charity. We ought indeed to *contend earneſtly for the Faith*[k], whenever it is oppoſed: but in a Manner worthy of it. Cruel Actions, opprobrious Words, inward ill Will, unjuſt bad Opinion, are abſolutely forbidden us, even towards the Enemies of the Goſpel: and upon the Whole, we do treat them with a Moderation, which they are far from imitating. But ſtill more gentle ſhould we be to ſuch, as believe Chriſtianity, but only miſunderſtand it: eſpecially conſidering, that we are juſt as liable to miſtake, as they. And it is a melancholy Conſideration, that whilſt one Part of thoſe, who profeſs our Religion, are ſo cool about its general and eſſential Intereſts; moſt of the other are ſo immoderately warm about their own particular Syſtems and Perſuaſions. Not only the Maintainers of eſtabliſhed Opinions are apt to judge hardly of

k Jude 3.

the rigid Oppoſers of them, and they to return it: but many, of greater Latitude, cry out for Liberty to themſelves, though they enjoy it to the full, with a Spirit of Perſecution: and whilſt they claim an unbounded Allowance for every new Notion, will give none to thoſe, who retain the old; but throw Imputations or Contempt upon them, without Equity or Mercy. What can be the Conſequence of this, but what we experience: that the bitter Things which we ſay of one another, Unbelievers, with ſeemingly good Reaſon, will ſay after us: and when we have taught them to condemn the ſeveral Sorts of Chriſtians, and eſpecially their Teachers, as the worſt of Men, will, by a very plauſible Inference, condemn Chriſtianity, as the worſt of Religions? How zealouſly ſoever therefore contending Parties may *hold faſt* what they profeſs: yet, violating the moſt indiſputable Duties by their Vehemence for diſputable Doctrines, they provoke great Numbers to ſit looſe to all Profeſſion; and do incredible Harm to the Religion, which they would ſerve. For, let us try what Methods we will, Nothing can ever ſo effectually promote true Faith, as joining to practiſe true Charity. But however unanimous Chriſtians may be in other Reſpects, they will neither

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do Honour to the Gospel, nor receive Benefit from it, unless they are also careful,

5. To be seriously and uniformly pious and virtuous. Yet, most unhappily, whatever else we differ in, we agree but too well in neglecting this. Multitudes call themselves Christians, who seem never to have thought of any Care of their Conduct; but make a solemn Profession of the purest and holiest Religion, that ever was; and at the same Time, throughout their Lives, do every Thing that they are inclined to, and Nothing else. Others that will observe some Restraints, would find, upon a fair Examination, that they follow their Passions, perhaps in as many or more Cases, than their Principles; or, which comes to the same Thing, accommodate their Principles to suit their Passions. And even they, who have little of any bad Inclination to lead them wrong, are very frequently led almost as wrong by indolent Compliance with bad Custom. For from whence is it, that the Generality of Men form their Rule of Behaviour? Not from Scripture, or from Reason: but from Fashion and common Practice: whatever they find People of tolerable Reputation do, that they do likewise. When a farther Step of wrong Indulgence is publicly taken, they proceed

ceed to take the ſame; or, it may be, one ſomewhat leſs: the Duties, which others throw off intirely, they practiſe rarely, and with Indifference: the Liberties, which others indulge without Reſerve, they approach towards with Heſitation and by Degrees: but as the World goes on from bad to worſe, they go on too; and imagine they are perfectly ſafe, becauſe they are a little behind. Now Men ſhould not indeed be ſuperſtitiouſly ſcrupulous: but they ſhould be conſcientiouſly attentive to their Hearts and Lives; and reflect what ought to be done, as well as obſerve what is done. The Goſpel forbids, inſtead of recommending, *Conformity to the World*[l]: by no Means with an Intention, that we ſhould be ſingular in Matters of Indifference, but reſolute againſt Compliances unlawful or dangerous. Chriſtians, far from being permitted to follow others into Sin, are deſigned to lead them into Piety and Virtue: to be *the Light, the Salt of the Earth*[m]: not to ſet an Example of uſeleſs Rigour, much leſs of uncharitable Cenſoriouſneſs; but of punctual and impartial Adherence to every Rule, which God hath appointed by Reaſon or Scripture, and faithful Endeavours to attain the great End of his Appoint-

l Rom xii. 2. m Matth. v. 13, 14.

ments:

ments: for without that, the exactest outward Regularity is empty Form. *Now the End of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure Heart and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned*[n]: a sincere Spirit of Love and Reverence towards our Maker, our Redeemer and Sanctifier; of Justice and Goodness to our Fellow-Creatures, of Reasonableness and Moderation, with Respect to the Advantages and Enjoyments of the present Life; for in these Things consists our Fitness for a better. This then is the real Temper of Christianity. And if we have either never felt it, or perceive ourselves declining and deviating from it; our Hearts growing fond of worldly Objects, and sinking down into that supine Disregard to God and our Duty, and a Judgement to come, which is undeniably the prevailing, and likely to be the fatal Distemper of the present Age: our Case and our Remedy are plainly laid down in that awful Exhortation to the Church of *Sardis*: *I know thy Works: that thou hast a Name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful; and strengthen the Things which remain, that are ready to die.—Remember, how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief;*

[n] 1 Tim. i. 5.

and thou shalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee°. But then to do this effectually, we must obey the whole Injunction of the Text: and not only *hold fast that which is* evidently *good*, but,

6. and lastly, *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil.* It might be translated, from every Kind of Evil. But even then, the Sense would be much the same. For though doing what we know to be wrong is a grosser Kind of Wickedness: yet doing what appears to us wrong, though we are not sure of it, is a real Kind: and even were we absolutely doubtful, still, if taking one Course may be acting amiss, and taking the contrary cannot; the general Rule certainly is, to lean always towards the securer Side: for why should we run into Danger needlessly? And yet what Numbers of miserable Creatures are there, whom the Observance of this one Direction would have made happy: who saw the safe Path, but would prefer the pleasing one; exulted in it for a while, then were ensnared of a sudden, and lost perhaps for ever! Nor is it Pleasure only, but Interest, Power, Vanity, Resentment, every Thing within us and around us, in its Turn, that may endanger our Innocence, by

° Rev. iii. 1, 2, 3.

tempting

tempting us to venture upon what we hope, but are not ſatisfied, is lawful. *Go not* therefore *in a Way, wherein thou mayeſt fall: be not confident in a plain Way* [p]. Even ſuch Actions, as appear to us very allowable, yet, if they appear evil to others, it is, ordinarily ſpeaking, both our Prudence and our Duty to abſtain from, as much as, with tolerable Convenience, we can. Whatever indeed, on mature Conſideration, we are fully perſuaded we ought to do, that we muſt do, let the World think as it will. But where we apprehend a Thing to be only permitted: if the wiſe will diſapprove it, or the injudicious miſinterpret it; if the good will be afflicted, or the bad rejoice at it; if rigid and warm Tempers will be guilty of cenſuring us for it raſhly; or eaſy and complying ones follow us in it, againſt their Judgements; if our taking harmleſs Liberties will encourage others to take ſinful ones: in ſhort, if any how, by doing what otherwiſe we might, we ſhall induce any one elſe to do what he ought not: the great Law of Chriſtian Charity requires, *that no Man put a Stumbling-block, or Occaſion to fall, in his Brother's Way*; or do any Thing, whereby he *is grieved, or offended,*

[p] Ecclus. xxxii. 20, 21.

or made weak[q]. Shewing this tender Care neither to intice nor provoke a ſingle Perſon, if it can be avoided, into Sin of whatever Sort, but to *pleaſe our Neighbour for his Good, to Edification*[r], is a Precept, I believe, peculiar to the Goſpel: or at leaſt hath ſo peculiar a Streſs laid on it there, as to diſtinguiſh our Religion, greatly to its Honour, from every other Inſtitution of Life, that the World hath known.

After ſuch an Addition to all the reſt, there cannot be a completer Proviſion imagined, by Rules of Behaviour, for the Virtue, the Peace, the eternal Felicity of Mankind. And therefore Nothing remains, but what muſt depend on ourſelves; that, having the beſt and fulleſt Directions, the nobleſt Promiſes, the moſt gracious Helps, we think ſeriouſly, while it is Time, what Uſe we ought to make, and what we do make, of theſe Advantages. The Word of God will ſhew us the firſt: our own Conſciences, if honeſtly conſulted, will tell us the latter. Happy are they in the higheſt Degree, who can ſtand the Compariſon of the two: and happy they, in the next Place, whom a deep Senſe, that at preſent they cannot, excites effectually to earneſt Supplications, and faithful

q Rom. xiv. 13, 15, 21. r Rom. xv. 2.

Endeavours

Endeavours, that they ſoon may. I conclude therefore with the Words following my Text. *The very God of Peace ſanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole Spirit, and Soul and Body, be preſerved blameleſs unto the Coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*[s].

[s] 1 Theſſ. v. 23.

SERMON IV.

LUKE xii. 57.

Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?

THE Duties, which God hath enjoined us, though reasonable and beneficial in the highest Degree, are yet, through the Depravity of human Nature, and the Prevalence of bad Customs, become so unacceptable, that they are practised, as we must be sensible, but imperfectly by the best, and very little by the largest Part of the World. Yet avowedly to neglect doing what they ought, is too shocking a Behaviour to sit easy upon the Minds of Men. Some Plea therefore they must find out, either to justify, or at least to excuse, their Manner of Life. And various are, and ever have been, the Excuses, invented by the irreligious and immoral, not only to maintain

ſome Character amongſt others, but chiefly to quiet themſelves.

Now of all theſe, one of the beſt, if it were a true one, would be that of Ignorance: not knowing that ſuch and ſuch Things are incumbent on us. This appears to be a Caſe, to which not only Compaſſion muſt have Regard, but which even Juſtice itſelf muſt acquit of Guilt. And therefore it is no Wonder, if many ſhelter themſelves under ſo favourable a Pretence.

The lower Part of Mankind, in general, on almoſt every Occaſion, alledge, that they have not the Advantages of Education and Inſtruction which others have: that they are not able, perhaps even to read that holy Book, in which their Duty is ſet forth: and if they be, yet the ſame Quickneſs to underſtand it, or Leiſure to ſtudy it, cannot be looked for from them, as if their Minds had been improved by Rules of reaſoning and judging, and their Time at their own Diſpoſal. A great deal they think may be required, with the utmoſt Reaſon, from thoſe of higher Rank: but from ſuch as they are, little or nothing.

But, beſides this vulgar Sort, there is alſo a learned Kind of Ignorance, pleaded by ſome,

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whoſe Freedom of Inquiry and ſuperior Sagacity hath given them Cauſe, they apprehend, to be very diffident of many Points, that others are firmly perſuaded of. And therefore they argue, that, though it may be the Duty of common People, who, for Want of the Means of Knowledge or of Abilities to uſe them, muſt believe what they are taught; though it may be right and neceſſary for them, in Conſequence of their Belief, to practiſe Virtue and Piety very conſcientiouſly: yet it muſt not be expected, that thoſe of greater Genius, who are more enlightened, and perceive many Doubts in theſe Matters, ſhould put themſelves under diſagreeable Reſtraints, merely on Account of uncertain Speculations; and conform their Lives to the rigid Precepts of Chriſtianity, when they are really not well ſatisfied of the Authority of it; nor, it may be, even of natural Religion.

Thus, you ſee, the loweſt Incapacity and the higheſt Self-opinion can urge in Effect the ſame Argument, to evade what Men have no Mind to. And I ſhall now ſhew, that in both it is inconcluſive; and fully confuted by our Saviour's home Queſtion, *Yea, and why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*

These Words appear, by the parallel Places in the other Evangelists, to have been originally designed against those amongst the *Jews*, who, from Dislike of the Strictness of our blessed Lord's Morality, pretended Ignorance of his divine Mission, after he had given abundant Proofs of it; when yet, without any separate Proofs of it at all, the main Things which he taught, carried their own Evidence along with them, and every Man's Heart bore Witness to their Truth. They had seen Miracles, of various Kinds, performed in Attestation of his Claim: yet still they were not content without more, and those of their own chusing. *The Pharisees came forth, with the Sadducees also, tempting him, and sought of him a Sign from Heaven*[a]. But he, with no less Dignity than Prudence, refused to gratify a Curiosity, both ill-meaning and endless: and *sighing deeply in his Spirit*, as St. *Mark* informs us[b], at this perverse Disposition of theirs; told them, with a kind, because needful, Severity of Speech, where the Defect lay. *A wicked and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign*[c]: your sinful Inclinations and Lives, not the Want or the Desire of sufficient Evidence,

[a] Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. [b] Verse 12. [c] Matth. xvi. 4.

prompt you to this Demand: and *verily I ſay unto you, there ſhall be no Sign given*, no ſuch viſible Manifeſtation of divine Glory as you inſolently require, vouchſafed *to this Generation*[d]: nor is it requiſite. *When ye ſee a Cloud riſe out of the Weſt, ſtraightway ye ſay, there cometh a Shower, and ſo it is. And when ye ſee the South Wind blow, ye ſay, there will be Heat, and it cometh to paſs. Ye Hypocrites, ye can diſcern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth: but how is it that ye do not diſcern this Time*[e]? That is: on other Occaſions you appear very able to judge of Things by the proper Indications of them. How can you then, with any Colour of Sincerity, pretend, that amidſt ſo many Prophecies fulfilled, and ſo many Miracles performed, you have not, after all, ſufficient Conviction, that this is the Seaſon when the Meſſiah ſhould appear, and that I am He? Nay, as to the principal Part of my Doctrine, which is the real Cauſe of your Antipathy to the Whole; as to the great Precepts of pure Religion and uniform Virtue, and your Need of Repentance and Faith in God's Mercy; what Occaſion is there for any farther Demonſtrations of them, than your own Hearts, if honeſtly

[d] Mark viii. 12. [e] Luke xii. 54, 55, 56.

consulted, will not fail to afford? *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

Now this Method of reasoning is equally applicable to Unbelievers and Cavillers in all Ages. It is in vain for them, to invent new Difficulties, or magnify old ones, concerning the Authority of our Religion; while the Reason of Things, the Truth of Facts, and the Nature of God and Man, continue to exhibit so full Proof of those fundamental Articles of it, the eternal Obligation of moral Duties, the Sinfulness of every one's Nature and Life, the Necessity of Repentance, and humble Application for Pardon and Grace. And, since the true Quarrel of such Persons is against these Doctrines, and these cannot be shaken: they had much better reconcile themselves to the Whole, than make fruitless Attacks upon one Part; in which if they were to succeed, (as they never will) they would, in Point of Argument, be almost as far from their favourite Scheme, of Liberty to do what they please, and think highly of themselves notwithstanding, as they were before. Suppose there are some Doctrines, against which they can find more Objections, than their Neighbours: there are surely others, of which they can discern more clearly the certain

tain Grounds. If not, they have employed their imagined ſuperior Faculties to very ill Purpoſe. Or, were they to doubt of ever ſo many Points; yet, if they take Pains for it, and force themſelves to doubt, hunting every Way for Difficulties, aſking for no Solutions, and turning a deaf Ear to them when offered; they have no more Excuſe for any Part of their conſequent wrong Behaviour, than if they had no Doubts at all. For the Whole of their Caſe is: they perplex Things on Purpoſe, in order to complain that they are not clear: walk with their Eyes wilfully ſhut, and then inſiſt, that they cannot be blamed, if they ſtumble; for it is quite dark, and they do not ſee a Step of their Way.

But let us now proceed to thoſe, who acknowledge themſelves, as many of the former would, if they had more Modeſty, the leſs knowing Part of Mankind. Some of theſe profeſs a ſecond-hand Sort of Scepticiſm; built not ſo much on their own Judgment, as that of their admired Leaders juſt mentioned. But ſince the Maſters are indefenſible, their implicit Diſciples muſt be yet more ſo. For, if the Queſtion is to be decided by the Authority of Men of Letters and Abilities, the greateſt Number and moſt eminent, beyond

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all Comparison, have confessedly been always on the Side of Religion: even excluding the Clergy, as interested in the Case: which, however, is by no means thought a sufficient Reason, in other Professions, why Men of known Skill and Probity should be disregarded, in what they unanimously affirm, after careful Examination.

But the Generality of the unlearned confess the Obligation of Christianity most readily; yet daily transgress its Laws: and, when they are charged with their Fault, plead Ignorance, as we have seen, amongst other Things, especially the lower Part of them, to excuse their Disobedience to the clearest Revelation of God's Will, that the World ever knew; and whose early Distinction it was, that *the Poor had the Gospel preached to them*[f]. Why then may we not say to such, as our Saviour said to the Jews; *Ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth?* You can judge in all the common Affairs of Life. You can attain to a competent Skill, many Times to great Perfection, in your several Employments, and Trades: though attended with many Difficulties, and requiring much Application and

[f] Matth. xi. 5.

Dexterity.

Dexterity. You can foresee, at a Diſtance, what will make for your worldly Intereſt, or againſt it: you can lay Schemes, full of Cunning and long Reach, for guarding againſt Dangers, retrieving Loſſes, ſecuring and improving Advantages. What hinders you then from arriving at the Knowledge of Religion; which conſiſts in Things much eaſier to be underſtood: Love and Reverence to God, Juſtice and Goodneſs to your Fellow-creatures, reaſonable and virtuous Government of yourſelves, humble Recourſe to the divine Mercy when you have done amiſs, and faithful Uſe of the divine Aſſiſtance to amend? If you have Inſtructors in the Management of Buſineſs, and the Wiſdom of this World: have you not Inſtruction alſo in the Precepts of a Chriſtian Life? One Day in ſeven of your Time, at leaſt, you are not only allowed, but enjoined, to ſpend principally in learning and thinking of your Duty. The Word of God is read to you, if you are not able to read it yourſelves: it is explained to you, if it be not already plain enough: and the moſt important Parts are the plaineſt of all. The ſeveral Articles of Chriſtian Faith and Practice are taught you in your earlieſt Childhood; and imprinted on your Memory at the Time,

when Impressions are most lasting. They are afterwards more distinctly proposed to you from this Place, Week after Week; and inforced on you by Motives no less powerful, than the Love of eternal Happiness and the Dread of eternal Misery. There is no Sin you practise, no good Action you omit, but you are publicly warned, at one Time or another, of your Fault and the Danger of it; and there is no Doubt or Scruple, that can disquiet you, concerning any Branch of your Behaviour, but you may open your Case often to your more learned and more prudent Neighbours, always to the Ministers of God's Word, and receive Satisfaction about it. What possible Room is there left then for pleading Ignorance of your Lord and Master's Will? This is a Description of the Means of Knowledge, with which the lowest and meanest among Believers are provided. And even to these may be applied, though not in an equal Degree, yet with great Truth, what our Saviour declared to his immediate Disciples: *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have desired to see those Things that ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them: but blessed*

blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears for they hear[g]. Ignorant and knowing are comparative Terms: and Men usually compare themselves with those, that are next them only; and draw false conclusions from doing so. A Christian, of smaller Opportunities for Improvement than some of his Fellow-Christians, thinks every Thing ought to be forgiven him for that Reason. And yet, in Reality, not only the admired Sages of heathen Antiquity, but the Patriarchs that were favoured with Communications from Heaven, the Prophets and Penmen of Scripture under the Jewish Dispensation, nay the immediate Fore-runner of our blessed Lord himself, who saw him and conversed with him on Earth, had less Means of Acquaintance with the Doctrines of Religion, than the poorest Disciple of Christ now may have, if he will. *Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of Women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven*, in the Gospel Age, *is greater than he*[h].

But it may be imagined perhaps, that the Benefits of religious Instruction are partially represented, and spoken of much too highly,

g Matth. xiii. 16, 17. h Matth. xi. 11.

by those who are concerned in dispensing them. Why, be it so then. Let us lay aside for a while the Consideration of what you learn here. Your Maker hath by no Means trusted you intirely to our Care: but hath appointed your Parents, your Friends, every serious Person around you, for your Instructors too: nay, to co-operate with all these, he hath placed a faithful Witness and Monitor of his Truths in every Breast; and therefore the Want of outward Helps can never justify Transgressors. What *Moses* said in God's Name to the Jews, is true in Relation to all Men: *The Commandment, which I command thee this Day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: but the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy Mouth and in thy Heart, that thou mayest do it*[i]. And what *Isaiah* said of Christianity, holds in Proportion of natural Conscience: *An high Way shall be there: and it shall be called the Way of Holiness: the way-faring Men, though Fools, shall not err therein*[k]. The Duties of Mankind are not so intricate and perplexed, but that a good Heart, without a very sagacious Head, may easily find its Way through them. For the Confirmation of this, let us take a View of the fundamental Parts of practical Religion;

[i] Deut. xxx. 11, 14. [k] If. xxxv. 8.

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those which Men are most apt to fail in; and see which of them all any one can fairly say he was ignorant of, or doubtful about, and had not the Means of sufficient Light to direct his Steps.

To begin with the Belief and Worship of Almighty God. Is not every Man capable of seeing, let him be ever so little acquainted with Nature, that the Heavens and the Earth, the Order of the Seasons, the Returns of Day and Night, the whole Frame of Things in general, is full of Use and Beauty; and must be the Work of amazing Power, Wisdom and Goodness? Doth not every Man feel, that he is frail and dependent, that his Life and Being is not owing to himself, nor consequently, that of his Parents to them, and therefore they all proceed from a superior Cause? Doth not every Man perceive, that he is *fearfully and wonderfully made*[1]; that the several Parts of his Composition are exactly fitted to the several Purposes of Life; the Eye for seeing, the Ear for hearing, each Member for its respective End? And his inward Inclinations and Affections no less so, than his outward Limbs? Must not every Man be sensible, that the Supports and Conveniences, which

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 14.

he enjoys, are not ſupplied him merely by his own Care; but chiefly by the Providence of another, *who maketh his Sun to riſe*[m], *his Wind to blow*[n], *his Rain to deſcend*, his Earth to be fruitful? Hath not every Man heard it owned, that the more diligently any one Part of Nature is examined, the fuller Proofs it affords, that an Almighty, allwiſe and gracious Being, muſt be the Author of the Whole? And what he hath made, no Doubt but he governs and ſuperintends. This is the plain obvious Account of Things, that one ſhould think muſt almoſt offer itſelf of Courſe to every common Mind, without any Learning at all: and the deepeſt Learning gives it the ſtrongeſt Confirmation. Nor is it ſo much as pretended, that any Account hath been attempted of the Origin of the World, or any Thing in it, different from what Religion aſſigns, but it hath been either palpably falſe and abſurd, or impenetrably dark and unintelligible. It being then ſo clear, that there is a Maker and Preſerver of all, infinitely powerful, wiſe and bounteous, what can be more viſible than our Duty; to praiſe him for his Mercies, pray to him for the Continuance of them, place our Happineſs in his Favour, fear his Diſpleaſure,

[m] Matth. v. 45. [n] Pſ. cxlvii. 18.

and do his Will? Surely the moſt ignorant among us, that think at all, cannot but find all this written in their Hearts: nor can the acuteſt and moſt artful diſpute againſt it, without being ſelf-condemned. And what then hath any one to plead for himſelf, if he lives regardleſs of Him, *in whom he lives, aud moves, and hath his Being*[o]; without Gratitude to his Bounty, from whom all he hath, or can hope for, comes; without Obedience to his Commands, who requires Nothing of us, but for our own Good; without Reſignation to his Will, who is rightful Lord of the Univerſe, and uſes boundleſs Authority only to the Purpoſes of infinite Goodneſs? Surely, as the Apoſtle reaſons, ſince *the inviſible Things of God, even his eternal Power and Godhead, are clearly ſeen from the Creation of the World, being underſtood by the Things that are made; they are without Excuſe, who, when they know God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful*[p].

Let us now proceed to the Duties, which we owe to our Fellow-creatures. The Senſe of theſe, becauſe they are of more immediate Importance to the Good of Society, God hath imprinted with greater Strength on our Minds,

[o] Acts xvii. 28. [p] Rom. i. 20, 21.

than even that of our Obligations to himſelf. As it muſt be the Will of him, who is ſo juſt and good to us all, that we ſhould be juſt and good to one another; and from this Principle, as the Root, every Branch of right Behaviour ſprings: ſo he hath planted in our Hearts a natural Love of Equity, a natural Feeling of kind Affection; a natural Conſcience, applauding us when we act according to theſe Diſpoſitions, condemning us when we violate them: and ſeldom do we deſerve its Reproaches, but either at the Time, or ſoon after, we undergo them. Conſider but a little more particularly, what the mutual Duties of Men are: Honeſty and Fairneſs in their Dealings, Truth in their Words, Friendlineſs in their Demeanor, Willingneſs to forgive Offences, reſpectful Obedience to Superiors, ready Condeſcenſion to Inferiors, tender Love to near Relations, Pity and Relief of the Poor, diligent Care to be ſerviceable to Mankind in our proper Station. Which one of theſe Obligations (and all the Reſt are like them) can any pretend he was ignorant of, or doubtful about? Who of us all hath ever done an unjuſt, a hard, an ill-natured, a paſſionate, an undutiful, an inſolent, Action; or lived an idle, uſeleſs life; and can truly ſay, he was not ſenſible that he did amiſs?

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We all know, when others do amiſs in theſe Reſpects: and therefore we are very capable of knowing, when we do ſo ourſelves. We may drown the Voice of Conſcience in turbulent Paſſions and vehement Purſuits of Profit or Pleaſure; we may coolly and deliberately refuſe to obey it: but it will ſpeak, and from Time to Time will be heard. And therefore it is not Ignorance or Doubt, but Wickedneſs of Heart, and *holding the Truth in Unrighteouſneſs*[q], that makes us negligent of, and injurious to each other, ſo often as we are.

The third Part of our Duty is the Government of ourſelves, according to the Rules of Sobriety, Temperance, and Chaſtity. Now who doth not know, that the Obſervance of theſe Virtues is right and fit: that the Violation of them is prejudicial to the Reaſon, the Health, the Reputation, the Fortunes, the Families of Men, and introduces Riot and Madneſs, Confuſion and Miſery, into the World? Who doth not ſee, that Superiority to the Cravings of Appetite, and Scorn of irregular Gratifications, is a worthy, an honourable Character: and that Exceſs, Diſſoluteneſs, and Debauchery, hath ſomething low and ſhameful in it: and ſtill more ſo, as, by

[q] Rom. i. 18.

habitual Indulgence, Men come to be leſs aſhamed of it? Can any one ſay, he did not know, that Gluttony and Drunkenneſs and promiſcuous Lewdneſs were ſins: but thought them as conſiſtent with the Obligations of a rational Nature, the good Order of Society, and the Commands of his Maker, as Moderation and Self-denial? And if no Man is capable of miſtaking thus, why is not *the Judgement of God according to Truth, againſt them which commit ſuch Things*[r]?

But further yet: Doth not every Man know in his Conſcience, that plain as his Duties to God, his Fellow-creatures and himſelf, are, he hath, more or leſs, tranſgreſſed them all; that he hath a Nature continually prone to Tranſgreſſion; that therefore he needs both Pardon for what is paſt, and Aſſiſtance for the Time to come; and that he can have neither, but through God's undeſerved Mercy? Or, however ignorant Men left to their own Reaſon may be through Careleſsneſs and Wickedneſs, as they were indeed amazingly ignorant; or, whatever Doubts they had, after ſinning, concerning their Forgiveneſs and Acceptance, as they could not help having great Doubts: yet at leaſt muſt not every Profeſſor of the Goſpel be ſenſible, both

[r] Rom. ii. 2.

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what he is to do, and what he may promise himself on complying with the Terms which it proposes: and that these are, *Repentance towards God, Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ* [*], and humble Use of the appointed Means of Grace: of Attention to the Reading and Preaching of God's Word, earnest Prayer, worthy Participation of the holy Sacrament? And how can he then plead Ignorance hereafter, if he resolves now to live according to his own Fancy, and to stand or fall by his own Merits; and haughtily despises, or indolently neglects, applying, as a penitent Sinner ought, to infinite Goodness?

Upon the whole, since most of the main Branches of our Duty are thus obvious to our Understandings of themselves; and all of them are constantly taught us, by the holy Scripture, by the Laws of our Country, by the Opinion and Consent of the wisest and best of Mankind, by the Instructions of Persons appointed for that Purpose; what Account do we imagine we shall possibly be able to give, why Religion, so easily apprehended, is so little practised by us? If any do not know what is commanded; it must be, because they avoided knowing it: if any Doubt of the Reality of the Command; the

* Acts xx. 21.

Reaſon is, that they deſire to doubt: and how can we flatter ourſelves, that any Thing is excuſable, which proceeds from a Diſpoſition of Mind ſo groſſly and wilfully wrong? Suppoſe a Servant of ours had purpoſely kept out of the Way of receiving our Orders, or invented Perplexities and Cavils about the Meaning of them, or the Certainty of our having delivered them, becauſe he had no Mind to obey them: would that juſtify him? Should we not immediately tell him, that what he eaſily might and clearly ought to have known and underſtood, he was inexcuſable, if he would not know and underſtand? And what muſt we think of our great Maſter in Heaven, if we try to impoſe on Him with Devices and Tricks, that will not paſs amongſt ourſelves?

But in Reality Men have not this Excuſe, if it were one. They do know, how they ought to behave; they do know that they ought *to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this World, looking for*[1] the Recompences of another: and they well know in the Main, what Particulars this Obligation comprehends; how grievouſly they have fallen ſhort of them, and what need they have to repent and humbly beg Forgiveneſs

[1] Tit. ii. 12, 13.

and Strength, through him who hath procured us a Title to both. Nor can they pretend, that theſe are trifling Matters: the Happineſs even of this Life depends on them; or, if it did not, the all-ſeeing God hath enjoined them, as the Conditions and the Means of Happineſs in the next; the Judge of the whole Earth will inquire ſtrictly at the great Day into our Performance of them; and there can be no good Account given him, why a plain Duty was omitted or tranſgreſſed. We can eaſily deceive each other [redacted]: we can make ſpecious Pleas one to another for our Failings; which the Occaſion that we have for Allowances in our Turn, incline us often to look upon very favourably in our Neighbours. But, in the Sight of God, ſuppoſing a Thing incumbent on us, and ſuppoſing it eaſily known to be ſo: what can be ſaid to the Purpoſe, why we did not perform it? "We were poor and ignorant." But we were not, or we needed not to have been, ignorant in this Particular. "We were ſuſpicious and doubtful." But our Doubts were affected, not real; or partial, not honeſt and upright. Or if we doubted ever ſo fairly about ſome Things; why did not we thoſe, of which we could not doubt? And even for the reſt,

why

why did we not take Care, that our Practice ſhould be on the undoubtedly ſafer, that is, the virtuous and religious Side? "But we had ſtrong Inclinations, that prompted us to the Courſe we took." No Wonder: here was the Trial of our Virtue; it was our Buſineſs to have reſiſted them, "But human Virtue is not ſufficient." Therefore we ſhould have applied earneſtly for divine Grace, "But we were ſurpriſed into wrong Behaviour." It was our Buſineſs to be watchful; and at leaſt a Habit and a Life of Sin cannot happen by Surpriſe. In ſhort, let us multiply Pretences as long as we pleaſe, the very Nature of Duty implies, that it ought to be done.

Still there are ſome, eſpecially in ſome Circumſtances, who are to a much greater Degree excuſable for the Sins they are guilty of, than others. But yet an Excuſe is not a Juſtification: and will leaſt of all prove ſuch to thoſe, who, inſtead of endeavouring to act right, ſet themſelves to contrive Reaſons, why their acting wrong ſhould be diſpenſed with. It is true, the very beſt have their Faults: and Faults not indulged ſhall be forgiven us, if we are truly ſorry for them, and earneſtly apply to God's Mercy through Chriſt for Pardon, and carefully

carefully watch against the Return of them. But when Men first allow themselves to sin, then stand on their own Defence; and particularly, if they plead Ignorance or Doubtfulness of what they have such abundant Means of knowing and being sure of: they must not hope, that this Conduct, if they persevere in it, can escape final Condemnation.

It ought however to be acknowledged after all, that many have comparatively but low Abilities, and small Opportunities for Knowledge: and that to some, whose Understandings are not weak, but perversely turned, greater Opportunities are of small Use; for what enlightens others, only dazzles them. And accordingly our Saviour most equitably considers these Disadvantages; and acquaints us, ten Verses before the Text, that *the Servant, which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes*[u]. But these Words, though full of Terror to the great, the learned and the wise, if they neglect their Duty; by no Means carry in them that Encouragement to the Poor, the

[u] Luke xii. 47, 48.

illiterate, and ſlow of Apprehenſion, which poſſibly they may ſeem to do. For they chiefly relate, not to ſuch Times as ours; but that, in which they were ſpoken: when the Jews had great Light, and therefore great Guilt if they ſinned; but the Gentiles were, and had been long, in profound Darkneſs: *the Times of which Ignorance God* is repreſented, as in Compariſon *winking at*; but *now*, in the Goſpel Age, he *commands*, under ſeverer Penalties, *all Men every where to repent*; becauſe he hath given them a clearer Knowledge of his Pleaſure, and a fuller *Aſſurance* of his *judging the World in Righteouſneſs**. And yet it muſt be obſerved, our Saviour did not apprehend any one to have been ſo ignorant, even then, of his Maſter's Will, as to eſcape being puniſhed for tranſgreſſing it; but declares, that he who knew the leaſt of it; *he who*, compared with others, *knew it not*; knew enough however to deſerve being *beaten with Stripes*; though fewer, than they ſhould undergo, who, with ſtronger Conviction, and diſtincter Perceptions of their Duty, were equally Tranſgreſſors of it. And how ſevere even the mildeſt Puniſhments of a wicked Life may be, God forbid we ſhould any of us try. For whoever ſins wilfully in

* Acts xvii. 30, 31.

Hopes

Hopes of ſuffering but little hereafter; for that very Reaſon will be made to ſuffer a great deal.

The Concluſion of the whole Matter is, that we have Reaſon all to apply to ourſelves the Prophet's Words: *He hath ſhewn thee, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord thy God requireth of thee*[x]. And though it ſtill be true, that ſome Ages of the World have been dark, and others blinded with falſe Lights; that ſome Men naturally ſee little, and others are ſtrangely given to ſee wrong: yet, in general, the Duties of Life are level to the Capacities of all Men: and eſpecially among Chriſtians, but above all, Chriſtians ſo peculiarly bleſſed with the Means of Inſtruction, as we of this Nation are, no one can poſſibly, without either deliberate Obſtinacy, or intolerable Negligence, continue unacquainted with what he is bound to do; or the Recompence he is to expect, if he do it not. *For this is the Condemnation; that Light is come into the World, and Men have loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil*[y].

[x] Micah vi. 8. [y] John iii. 19.

SERMON V.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

——*Lovers of Pleasures, more than Lovers of God.*

THE wise and gracious Ruler of the World, hath created us to obey him, and from that Obedience to receive our proper Share of Happiness. He hath adapted a Variety of Satisfactions to the various Parts of our Frame: and taught us by Nature, but more distinctly by his Word, the due Subordinations of each; and the Circumstances, in which we may or may not lawfully partake of them. Some of these are capable of being exactly specified: and in such we cannot transgress, without either acknowledging our Guilt, or daring to deny the Authority of the Law. Many take the humbler Method of the two, and yet grow little, if at all, better: many the bolder, and grow continually worse. Both are frequently admonished, and may be left at present

 to

to their own Reflections. But other Cases admit only a general and less accurate Description: which leaves Room for those, who desire it, to go very improper Lengths, and still imagine they are within Bounds. Thus, in eating and drinking; to use the good Creatures of God with Delight is certainly allowable: and therefore too many set their Minds to a strange Degree on the Practice and the Study of this meanest of Gratifications; and think they may load and inflame themselves without Scruple, provided they stop but at all short of shocking Intemperance. Thus again what we commonly call Amusements are in their Nature innocent. God hath formed us for pleasing Intercourse, and put Mirth in our Hearts with Intent that we should exert it. The sprightly Disposition of Youth calls for gladsome Activity: the Fatigues of Business, the Infirmities of Old Age, the Wearisomeness of ill Health and low Spirits, often require the best Relief, that Cheerfulness can minister. And not to allow, that our Maker considers *whereof we are made*[a], would be giving an Idea of Religion both unamiable and false. But then, just how far each of us may lawfully

[a] Ps. ciii. 14.

carry our Indulgence, cannot be minutely pointed out. And therefore, instead of being contented to speak and think mildly of others, which would be a right Use of this Uncertainty; we are apt to be negligent of restraining ourselves, which is a very wrong one. For there are numberless Things, in which Limits cannot be fixed precisely, and yet considerable Excesses are destructive. Now in all these, our Ignorance ought to teach us a reasonable, though not scrupulous, Caution: but especially in Matters of gay Entertainment: because the present Age hath confessedly a peculiar Turn that Way. Whether the preceding ones had not other Faults as bad, is out of the Question: our Concern is to watch against our own: for which Purpose the Text affords us a most equitable and comprehensive and trying Direction; that we are not to *love Pleasures more than God:* meaning, than our Duty to Him. For, *this is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments*[b]. Now he hath enjoined us very important Duties: of improving ourselves in every Thing worthy, and being serviceable to our Fellow-Creatures. What Influence then upon these will our Amusements, as we conduct them, have?

[b] 1 John v. 3.

The more ſteadily we apply, without impairing our Healths or Faculties by it, to Affairs of real Uſe, the properer Part we act in Life. Do then indeed our ſerious Occupations wear us down ſo, that we need all the Time, which we take, to recruit ourſelves? Or do we only, when we are tired of one Trifle, run to another? Is it Matter of Humiliation to us, that we are obliged to ſpend ſo much of every Day inſignificantly: or do we take a Pride in ſpending it thus; lead as many into the ſame Way as we can, and throw Contempt on thoſe, whom we cannot? Have we impartially examined, what Obligations, public and private, are incumbent on us: whether we are chiefly attentive to theſe, omitting none; or to what other Things, and what the Benefit of them is: whether it be any other, than keeping ourſelves in Humour, like froward Children? We ſhould do well to ſtate the Diſpoſal of our Time: firſt ſet down, how much we employ in each of our Concerns of Moment; then how much goes in Diverſions of one Kind or another, in preparing for them, in Refreſhment after them, in needleſs Company at home and abroad; and, if the Diſproportion be great, think beforehand, how wretched a Void and Blank, at beſt, our Lives will appear at the

Cloſe

Cloſe of them to have been, ſhould the Remainder of them be waſted in the ſame Manner.

We all wiſh to be diſtinguiſhed to our Honour. But in whoſe Eyes will ſuch Perſons, or a Nation compoſed of ſuch, be honoured? and for what Qualifications? Knowledge and Prudence require Induſtry and Experience to attain them: Worth and Probity require thoughtful Self-inſpection. And one doth not ſee, how they, who claim only outſide Preeminences, can poſſibly eſteem one another; or why they ſhould wiſh to herd ſo much together, unleſs to take Comfort in their mutual Want of Merit. At leaſt vain Opinion will never convert Shew into Subſtance. We muſt ſurely know, that we are capable of more valuable Accompliſhments, and of delighting in them. Probably our Education hath furniſhed us with ſome Experience of improving our Underſtandings and our Tempers. Have we no Room left then for farther Improvements? Or have we loſt the Reliſh of them? And for what better have we exchanged it? Or how unhappily ſoever we were bred, as indeed too many young People are extremely pitiable for having been taught the leaſt of what was moſt worth learning; yet we muſt

be ſenſible, there are thoſe, who poſſeſs more ſolid Endowments? Are they then of no Value in Life, or have they not in all Ages been allowed to be of the higheſt? Why therefore ſhould not we ſtrive to reſemble them, and take a little Leiſure to think, how we may live to more Purpoſe? It may be, we do not deſire Leiſure to think. It is unentertaining: it is painful. But what a Figure do we make to others and ourſelves, if we cannot bear our own Company, but muſt fly to any Thing, rather than fail to get rid of it? Thought can be painful only becauſe we are acting amiſs: and then thinking ſo as to amend, is the only Remedy; and no Caſe is too far gone for it. Perhaps we are unable to carry on ſolitary Meditation to any good Effect. But we can have Recourſe to the Aſſiſtance of proper Books. Idle Reading indeed completes the Deſtruction of the Time, that idle Converſation ſpares us. But judicious Writings on the Subject of Conduct, religious, moral, and prudent, are at once the Medicine and the Nouriſhment of the Mind. If ſtill after theſe we want farther Inſtruction, every true Friend we have, every good Man we conſult, will gladly give it us. And with ſuch Helps,

why

why should we not assert our Share in the Dignity of human Nature?

But possibly we aspire to appear advantageously both in weightier Matters, and lighter. And by due Application, most People may, as far as they need. But then the chief Regard must ever be paid to the principal Point. For even elegant and liberal and learned Accomplishments have, by excluding still better Things, greatly diminished the Value of many Characters. And when such Attainments, as barely, if at all, rise above indifferent, or perhaps sink below it, divide our Esteem with laudable ones, the Mixture will do great Harm, both to ourselves, and, by its Example, to others. But when they are the main Objects of our Ambition; the Applause of the unthinking, should we procure it, will be bought much too dear; the Soul will lose its Vigour and grow frivolous; Matters of Consequence become distasteful; by Degrees the very Notion, which are so, will be effaced: and a Group of the reigning Follies of the Time being, engross the Heart. But particularly Self-Government will be forgotten in the Midst of Self-Indulgences, that will pretend to be harmless, till they prove undeniably cri-

minal. In these Circumstances, the Business of our Stations, the Examination of our Affairs, the Care of those who are most intimately connected with us, and, much more, the Inspection of our Hearts, of our State towards God, of our Title to a happy Eternity, will be continually postponed, or superficially hurried over, to comply with every trifling Engagement, every sudden Fancy, or even mere Indolence. And perhaps, rather than take the Pains of knowing and doing what we ought, we shall make it our Refuge to profess a Contempt of it: in which absurd Declaration, a natural or acquired Fluency of lively Talk will bear People out so well to those, with whom Similarity of Manners prompts them to associate, that before it is long, they will seem quite satisfied in neglecting every Thing they should mind.

Yet all the While, what they call a Life of Pleasure is very often only an Affectation of being pleased. They put on Airs of great Gaiety, and in Truth their Pleasures are flat and insipid: they relieve one tasteless Scene by another a little different; are miserable in the Intervals of their Amusements, and far from happy during the Continuance of them. Nay indeed,

indeed, under Colour of Relaxations, they are, to those who engage throughly in them, sore Fatigues; from which, whether they will confess it or not, Relaxation is much wanted: and some undergo a speedy, and many a lingering, Martyrdom to them. If Religion enjoined Men to mortify and macerate themselves at this Rate, what dreadful Names would it be called! In all Likelihood, were the Truth known, Numbers would chuse a quieter Way of living, if one Part of them could be sure, that the other would keep them in Countenance. It is great Pity therefore, but they should mutually explain themselves on this Tyranny of Fashion: and not go on together in wild Chaces of imaginary Pleasure, when they had all rather sit still. But farther, several, that would be sorry to quit their Diversions, follow them only to banish Reflection on some bad or imprudent Thing that they have done, or Course that they are in. Now as this can be no better than a palliative Cure, and will usually exasperate the Disease, they ought to seek a more effectual Remedy. And we should all consider, that probably the same Entertainments will not for ever afford us the same Delight: and yet by long Use it may

grow or ſeem hardly poſſible to do without them, though they not only miſbecome, but even tire us. Nay ſome, when they have once fixed it in their Minds, that Happineſs conſiſts in Gaiety, and find the innocent Sorts of gay Enjoyments are become taſteleſs, venture, for the Sake of a higher Reliſh, on ſuch as are pernicious even in this World.

Another Conſideration, both of Prudence and Duty, is, that the many Expences of this public Sort of Life are exceſſive; and to ſupply them, Creditors are frequently left unpaid, except the leaſt deſerving; due Proviſion for Children is omitted, and ignominious Arts of raiſing Money practiſed. Or if the Votaries of Pleaſure do obſerve Juſtice, let them aſk their Conſciences, what Proportion of their Income goes in Works of Piety, Mercy, Encouragement of uſeful Undertakings, and what in luxurious Trifles. It will be ſaid, that theſe laſt do Good by ſetting the poor to labour. But is our Intention to do Good by them, or only to gratify our Vanity and Voluptuouſneſs? Beſides, much more Good is done by procuring Health to the ſick, right Education to the young, Inſtruction to the ignorant and vicious, or by durable Works of general Utility and national

national Honour. And employing the lower Part of the People in miniſtering to the Luxury of the higher, can no more enrich or ſupport a Kingdom, than employing the Servants of a private Family in the ſame Manner, can enrich or ſupport that.

But one faſhionable Expence muſt be particularly mentioned: that which bears the Name, often very falſely, of Play. Be it for ever ſo little, conſuming much Time in it, is the moſt unimproving and irrational Employment that can be. But falſe Shame and Emulation frequently raiſe it to a very incommodious and diſtreſſing Height, even amongſt thoſe who profeſs to be moderate. And the Lengths that others go, are the moſt ſpeedily and abſolutely ruinous of all Things. The more calmly Men bear their Loſſes, the worſe; if they are the leſs likely to leave off for it. But uſually they feel moſt tormenting Agitations: yet ruſh on to loſe more, from a groundleſs Hope of Gain; and perhaps at Length call in Diſhoneſty to the Aid of Imprudence. I am unwilling to name the worſt Act of Deſperation, to which extravagant and vicious Indulgences too frequently lead. But ſurely it cannot fail to be viſible, that deliberately

and presumptuously ending an immoral and mischievous Life, by the impious and false Bravery of a voluntary Death, instead of an humble and exemplary Penitence, is the compleatest Rebellion against God, of which the Heart of Man is capable.

Another considerable Ingredient in the favourite Amusements of the World, are public Spectacles. And provided Regard be had to Time and Cost, they might be allowably and beneficially frequented, if they were preserved from Tendencies dangerous to Virtue. But Failings in that Article totally alter the Nature of them; and gross Failings reflect not only on our Morals, but our Taste. Indeed it is lamentable that, fond as we are of adopting the Fashions and Qualities of our Neighbours, often much for the worse, we should not import what is praiseworthy in them, but suffer the most dissolute of them to excell us in the Chastity of their dramatical Representations: yet after all, were they ever so innocent, in Proportion as they are trifling and insignificant, they are contemptible and unworthy of Regard.

But the Effects of less general Amusements, even of those at our own Houses, may be extremely hurtful, if they are the Means of admitting

admitting Perſons of profligate Conduct and Principles into familiar Converſation and Acquaintance with others. For hence they will have the Encouragement of finding, that they need not either amend or conceal their Faults to be well received. The inconſiderate, that is, moſt People, ſeeing little or no Difference made between good and bad Characters, will perſuade themſelves on Occaſion, that there can be no great Difference between good and bad Actions. But the young, above all, will be likely to admire thoſe, whom it extremely concerns them to abhor. For, in ſpite of the moſt prudent Cautions, which however are not always given them, they are eaſily impoſed on by a ſhewy Appearance, joined with plauſible Talk. And the common Talk of ſuch Aſſemblies, though it were never openly to aſſault Virtue, which yet may be eſpecially feared in ſuch of them where People converſe in Diſguiſes, and are or may ſeem unknown to each other, hath notwithſtanding many Things to undermine good Principles, and weaken right Sentiments, particularly the continual Suppoſition on which this whole Way of living is built, that Entertainment is the Buſineſs of our Being. They whoſe only School is the

World, will think ſo of Courſe: and in ſuch Places cannot be ſafely contradicted. Poſſibly, with all this, there may be no immediate ſtrong Symptoms of much Harm ſuffered in them. But ſtill as a Courſe of ſober Intemperance may damage the Health more, than great Exceſſes now and then: ſo may a Life, ſeemingly but a little too gay, corrupt the Heart more, than a few Acts of confeſſed Immorality.

And beſides the direct Danger to Morals, what Influence will it have on Piety? About that perhaps we are not ſolicitous. And yet, the firm Belief of a future Recompence muſt be the beſt Security of right Behaviour in all Circumſtances. And the King of the whole Earth cannot but require to have the due Reſpect and Homage he hath appointed paid him by his Subjects, as neceſſary to preſerve that Obedience to his Laws, without which it is impoſſible they ſhould be happy. Yet the public Worſhip of God, even on that Day which he hath appropriated to it, is almoſt intirely neglected by the greateſt Part of thoſe who live to Amuſements; and by many of them profeſſedly and contemptuouſly; though poſſibly attending it might afford them ſome Inſtruction, as well as expreſs proper Duty.

Much

Much leſs do they regard any other Seaſons, appointed for the peculiar Exerciſe of Serioufneſs: but, it may be, affect to crowd Diverſions into the moſt ſacred Week of it; either in wanton Defiance of public Authority and common Decency, or in Oſtentation of their imagined Superiority to vulgar Ways of thinking. But ſurely others know as well as they, that outward Obſervances in themſelves are Nothing. But ſtill, by their Effects, both in civil and religious Matters, they are very important Things: and may be uſeful to the wiſeſt Perſons. Though, indeed, when there is a little Weakneſs mixed with Piety and Virtue, they have no Title to ridicule it, who are guilty of the numberleſs Abſurdities of Diſſoluteneſs or Profaneneſs. And though the moſt innocent Superſtition ſhould be ſeparated from Religion if it can, yet not with the Hazard of rooting up both together.

But ſuppoſing we pay ſufficient Regard to theſe external Proprieties, what Diſpoſition doth our Attachment to Pleaſure leave us towards inward Devotion? Do we pray to God in private? Is it with Attention and Reverence? And doth that regulate the reſt of the Day, or the reſt of the Day wear out the Impreſſion

of

of that? Do we ſtatedly think of our Intereſt in the divine Favour, and our approaching State after Death, as our main Concerns? And do we not only fear the Judge of all, but love the Father of Mercy, ſuch as he hath exhibited himſelf to Man, by giving his Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to move us to all Good? Or hath not our Manner of living deadened our Feeling of theſe Things, if ever we had any: and are we not proceeding to efface the ſmall Remnants of them? This is not the Behaviour of a rational Creature, of a Penitent for Sin, of a Candidate for eternal Felicity: there can ariſe from it no *Meetneſs for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light* [c], no Suſceptibility of ſpiritual Happineſs, no Hope of *eſcaping the Damnation of Hell* [d]. Not only a few of our detached Hours, but our whole Being is God's, and to be employed as he approves. Our lawful daily Buſineſs, nay our needful Relaxations from it, we may humbly preſent to him, as Part of what he deſigned us for. But can we offer up a Series of Nothing but idle Diſſipations or worſe, and beg him to accept of that? Our baptiſmal Vow promiſed other

[c] Col. i. 12. [d] Matth. xxiii. 33.

Things

Things for us: the holy Scripture hath prescribed us a very different Sort of Conduct: hath told us, that we *cannot serve two Masters*[e]; that they, *who live in Pleasure, are dead, while they live*[f]; that he, who delighted himself splendidly every Day, and took this for his Portion, *lift up his Eyes in Torment*[g]. And are we then willing, both to fail of Reward, and suffer Punishment? Perhaps the latter may seem unjust, merely for spending our Days in harmless Diversions. But if otherwise they were harmless, would not a Servant of ours merit punishing, who for his own Gratification should obstinately neglect his allotted Share of Work in the Family? Now we are the Servants of our Maker: and he hath forewarned us, that a *slothful Servant* shall be deemed *a wicked one*[h].

But the Life of those, who love Pleasure more than God, is fuller of Guilt, in Proportion as it gives others a more public Invitation to live in the same Way. If the rich and great proclaim, that voluptuous Amusements are their Passion, and Religion their Contempt; as it will provoke the better Part of their Inferiors to think ill of them, which is a very undesirable Thing, so it

[e] Matth. vi. 24. [f] 1 Tim. v. 6. [g] Luke xvi. 19, 23.
[h] Matth. xxv. 26.

will incline the larger Part, without thinking at all well of them, to imitate their Example. For if they may behave ſo, the Concluſion will be boldly drawn, that every one elſe may. And yet the Effects of that Perſuaſion muſt be inſupportable. For how ſhall our Domeſtics, and neareſt Relations, all we have Concerns with, and the Body of the People in general, be kept from every Thing that is wrong and miſchievous, in the Midſt of ſuch numerous Temptations, if they learn from us to make Self-indulgence, unreſtrained by the Apprehenſions of a future Account, their governing Principle? Our Laws cannot be executed with Rigour: and Legiſlators and Magiſtrates will not be thought in earneſt, or, if they are, will be thought injurious, when they prohibit what the Practice of too many of them ſhews, they look upon as the only happy Life.

People of Faſhion, eſpecially of that Sex, which aſcribes to itſelf the moſt Knowledge, have nearly thrown off all Obſervation of the Lord's Day: perhaps keep ſuch Hours, that neither they, nor their Families, can go to Church, at leaſt in one Part of it: will vary thoſe Hours readily for any other Purpoſe, but by no Means for this. And when they have

paſſed

paſſed the Morning and Afternoon in Neglect of Piety, Numbers of them paſs the Evening in what they know will be commonly interpreted, and the more for that Neglect, an open Contradiction to Piety. Or if, to avoid Scandal, they ſometimes vouchſafe their Attendance on divine Service in the Country, they ſeldom or never do it in Town: where Patterns of it are peculiarly needful; and from whence Accounts of their Behaviour will ſoon be ſpread to the remoteſt Places where they have Influence. Now by theſe Means the Sunday, inſtead of being made, to thoſe beneath them, the uſefulleſt Part of their Time, by religious Worſhip and Inſtruction, Reading and Thought; as well as the Pleaſanteſt, by Reſt from Labour and friendly Intercourſe; becomes the moſt pernicious. A large Proportion of the Tradeſmen in theſe two Cities uſually ſpend the Whole of it abroad in Diverſions, often vicious, always coſtly: and by affecting them then, get a ruinous Taſte for them throughout the Week. The lower Sort ſtill are ambitious to follow them as cloſe as they can, every Day indeed, but on that eſpecially: conſume the Beginning of it, in ſtupid Sloth, the Remainder in Lewdneſs or Drunkenneſs, which impair their Faculties and deſtroy their Health;

besides intercepting the Profits of their Labour from those, whom it should maintain. And if they once come to think Gaming also allowable on that only Time, in which they have Leisure for it; the Losers will be yet more throughly undone and desperate, and the Winners not the richer, but only the more debauched.

Every Species of Wickedness cannot fail to make a great Progress amidst these licentious Principles and Practices: which are industriously propagated, both by the Discourse of bad Men, contrary to all common Prudence, and in Books also, published not only against revealed Religion, (which they who disbelieve will few of them believe any, and none to any great Purpose) but against a future Recompence of human Actions; and suited, in the Manner of writing, to every Reader, and, in the Price, to every Purchaser. Such as have learnt these Lessons, will yield, and no Wonder, to the present Solicitation of each Appetite and each Fancy, be the Consequences what they may. When they are distressed, they will venture on whatever Crime they think may enable them to go on a little longer: they will endeavour to conceal a first Crime by a second; and if at last they

cannot

cannot evade Punishment, they will despise it. For what is even Death, which every one may make as easy as he pleases, if they neither hope nor fear any Thing after it.

We of the Clergy are principally concerned to oppose this Torrent of Impiety: and I trust we do it with faithful Zeal. But the immediate Answer to us is, that we are pleading our own Cause: though indeed it is that of the Public. And therefore the hearty Concurrence of the Laity, jointly countenancing, by their Examples, their Favours, their Commendations, their Reproofs, by Reverence to Religion, Moderation in Pleasures, Frugality in Expence, Diligence in the Business of every one's proper Station, is highly necessary: and will complete the Blessing of the fullest Liberty, and most fatherly Administration of Government, that ever Nation enjoyed; which otherwise we are in imminent Danger of abusing, to our own deserved Ruin.

Yet too great strictness may do Harm, or disqualify for doing Good: and according to Circumstances, partaking of Amusements, that otherwise are not eligible, may be very prudent: besides that some may be under such Authority and Direction, as may oblige them

in Duty to what they cannot intirely approve. And then they ſhould endeavour to do it both obligingly and gracefully: but always remember, that they are on ſlippery Ground: never go farther, than is really innocent; never farther, than they need: much leſs, blame or deſpiſe thoſe, who are unwilling or unqualified to bear a Part with them: but carefully preſerve a juſt Preference for the higher Order of Obligations; be humble in the Midſt of Pomp, attentive to ſerious Reflections in the Midſt of Gaiety; do all they can, without expoſing themſelves, to guard or bring back others: and ſeize every Opportunity of promoting what is right, where too generally what is wrong abounds.

But they who are not called to enter far into the livelier Scenes of this World, will do very commendably, to ſhew by Facts, in a freer and opener Manner, their ſettled Perſuaſion, that Happineſs conſiſts in quite other Matters; to ſhew, that they can enjoy themſelves perfectly well, without having any Reliſh for theſe; nay, can abſtain from them without Difficulty, though they have a Reliſh for them. And the more they do ſo, keeping up their good Humour, the more exemplary they are. But the

the Clergy ſhould be patterns of this Abſtinence beyond all others. For if inſtead of being grave and ſtudious and laborious in our Profeſſion we diſſipate ourſelves in Vanities, or ſink into luxurious Delicacy or Indolence; the Awe of our Character, and the Weight of our Preaching will be loſt: the thoughtleſs will imagine they may ſafely ſtep a little farther than we; and thus will fall into palpable Sin: while the indifferent to Religion and Virtue will make it their Boaſt, that we aim to be as like them as for Shame we can; and will *blaſpheme*, on our Account, *the worthy Name, by which we are called*[i].

Poſſibly ſo many Cautions againſt Fondneſs for Pleaſure may ſeem to leave thoſe who regard them, in a very joyleſs and uneaſy Condition. But indeed they are only plain and very practicable Rules for that Diſcipline of our Temper and Conduct, which is neceſſary for our true Happineſs even here, and for our eternal Felicity hereaſter. Chriſtian Piety allows us, under ſuch Regulations as are evidently reaſonable, every Enjoyment of Senſe, every Delight of elegant Taſte, every Exertion of ſocial Cheerfulneſs; and forbids Nothing, but Miſchief, Madneſs and Miſery. Then beſides, it height-

i James ii. 7.

ens to the utmoſt all the nobler Satisfactions of the Mind: that of ſincere Good-will to all Men; that of tender Complacency in thoſe, to whom we are united more nearly: whence proceed honourable Eſteem, and affectionate Returns. Or, though we miſs the Regard we deſerve from Men, we ſhall have a reviving Conſciouſneſs, that we have acted worthily, that we have laboured to promote Goodneſs and Happineſs on Earth, that the Sins and Sufferings of our Fellow-creatures are not owing to us. This applauding Teſtimony of our Hearts will indeed be mixed with the Grief of many Failings: but alſo, with the Aſſurance, that our heavenly Father forgives them, for the Sake of our gracious Redeemer; with the Experience, that he is enabling us to overcome them, by the Grace of our inward Sanctifier, and preparing us daily for the Bleſſedneſs, to which he invites us. For ſuch Mercies we cannot but love him: and whoever doth ſo, is in Proportion beloved by him. The Senſe of this muſt give us great Compoſure about every Thing worldly, Diſdain of every Thing vicious, and Comfort in going through the very loweſt and hardeſt Acts of Duty. We ſhall paſs the Days of our Pilgrimage in as much Delight as the

the Nature of it affords: and when we come to our final Abode, every Capacity of ſpiritual Enjoyment, to which we have improved ourſelves here, ſhall be inconceivably augmented, and completely filled: we ſhall *be abundantly ſatisfied with the Fatneſs of God's Houſe, and drink of the River of his Pleaſures*[k]. *For in his Preſence is the Fullneſs of Joy, and at his right Hand there are Pleaſures for evermore*[l].

[k] Pſal. xxxvi. 8.

[l] Pſal. xvi. 11.

SERMON VI.

HEB. xii. 2.

Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith: who, for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God.

DIRECTING our Eye is necessary for guiding our Steps; and therefore the Apostle here directs the Eye of our Mind to Jesus Christ: whom if we so contemplate, as to learn what he was, and expects us to be, Nothing will be wanting to carry us happily through the Journey of Life. And it may be useful to begin with considering his familiar Manifestation of himself on Earth, whence we shall naturally be led to consider his higher and more awful Glories.

Now in this lowest View, we shall find him to have been the most amiable and the most venerable

venerable Perſon, beyond all Compariſon, that the World ever knew. Meditate only with ſerious Attention on the evidently artleſs Account given of him in the Goſpels, and you will ſee, with an Admiration continually increaſing, how perfect his Character was in every Point: how warm his Sentiments, yet how juſt his Notions, of Piety to his heavenly Father; how ſtrong and affectionate his expreſſions of it; yet how rational, and how peculiarly ſuitable to his very peculiar Situation: how compoſed his Reſignation, though with the acuteſt Feeling of all that he underwent; and how firm his Truſt in God even at the Hour of Death, under the moſt painful Senſe of the Light of his Countenance being withdrawn from him: how regular his Practice of the Whole of Religion, yet how accurate his Preference of one Part of it to another: how active and bold and perſevering his Zeal; yet how completely free from all the Weakneſs, and all the Bitterneſs, with which Zeal is too often accompanied; how intimately tempered with Patience towards the ſlow of Apprehenſion; Eſteem for the well meaning though erroneous; Pity for the bad, though perverſe and incorrigible: what

perpetual

perpetual Demonſtrations he gave, of Benevolence and Purity in his teaching, of Goodneſs and Condeſcenſion, Meekneſs and Tenderneſs, in his Behaviour, to all Perſons, however provoking, on all Occaſions, however trying: yet Goodneſs judiciouſly exerciſed, Condeſcenſion with Dignity, Meekneſs with due Severity againſt Sin, Tenderneſs without Partiality, or improper Compliances, to the neareſt of his Kindred, or the deareſt of his Diſciples: how compaſſionate a Love he ſhewed to his Country; yet how unlimited a Good-will to all the World: how remote he was from Self-indulgence, yet how far from encouraging uſeleſs Rigour and Auſterity: how diligently he turned the Thoughts of the Multitude, from empty Admiration of his Diſcourſes or his Works, to the conſcientious Performance of their own Duties; declined the moſt favourable Opportunities of riſing to worldly Power, and inculcated on his Followers the ſtrongeſt Warnings of what he and they were to ſuffer: with what Plainneſs he reproved both the People and their Rulers, yet with what Care he ſecured the Reſpect owing from the former to the latter: with what Simplicity and upright Prudence

he anſwered the Objections and captious Queſtions levelled againſt him, however ſuddenly attacked by them; and, though in ſo public a Life tried every Way continually, never once was overcome, never once diſconcerted: how ſurprizingly he avoided all the Artifices and all the Violence of his Enemies, as long as he choſe it; and how much ſuperior, not only to them, but, if poſſible, even to himſelf, he appeared, after he had put himſelf into their Hands, during the Whole of their barbarous and deſpiteful Treatment. Nor can it fail to be obſerved, as a moſt important Circumſtance, that all his wonderful Perfections were evidently natural to him, and ſat abſolutely eaſy upon him, without the leaſt Variation, or Inequality, or Effort exerted to raiſe himſelf up to, or ſupport, the higheſt Excellence, that he ever diſplayed. In ſhort, the Character of Jeſus Chriſt, like the Frame of God's Creation, the more deeply it is ſtudied, the more reſpectfully it will be admired. Some ſmall Particulars in each, yet much fewer than ſuperficial Obſervers imagine, it may be eaſier to cavil at, than to account for diſtinctly: but look at the Whole of either, and to every Eye that is capable of taking in a Whole,

it will approve itſelf uniformly great and good.

Now that he, of whom theſe Things are recorded, was a real Man, and not a Phantom of the Imagination, Infidelity itſelf hath never denied. And that he was truly the excellent Man, that the Goſpels deſcribe him to have been, we have the Teſtimony of Numbers that knew him, of more who converſed with thoſe that knew him; who all aſſerted it in the ſtrongeſt Terms, and ſuffered every Thing terrible for ſo doing. Their Enemies were never able to diſprove them: if they had, Chriſtianity muſt have ſunk: and indeed ſome of the moſt conſiderable of their Enemies, in all Ages, have owned them to be ſo far in the right. But if ſtill it be pretended, that his Portrait was drawn too favourably; who could draw it ſo? The *Greeks* and *Romans* never drew any, either from Life or Fancy, without ſome capital Fault. How came the *Jews*, how came the illiterate Evangeliſts, by ſuch extraordinary Skill? And further, how came they to aſcribe ſuch mild, ſuch paſſive Virtues, to their Meſſiah, whom the whole Nation expected to be, on the contrary, an enterprizing and proſperous Warrior? Had one of them deviated ſo unaccountably

accountably from the general Opinion; is it credible that they all ſhould? Had every one of them attempted to make a beautiful Picture of that Sort, without Regard to the Original; would all their Pictures have been like, yet each diſtinguiſhed by ſuch Peculiarities, as proved none of them to be copied from the other? Or ſuppoſing even that, could they have perſuaded an unwilling World, that theſe reſembled this Original, when plainly they did not?

Now if their Narratives be faithful Deſcriptions of a real Perſon, well may we aſk, as the *Jews* did with another Spirit, *Whence hath this Man theſe Things; and what Wiſdom is this, which is given unto him*[a]*? Is not this the Carpenter's Son*[b]*?* What Education had he to form him, what Patterns to form himſelf upon, to become the Man he was? By what Train of thinking could he be led to conceive, by what Proſpects could he be moved to undertake, by what Power was he enabled to accompliſh, the unparalleled Things he did? To imagine that ſuch a one exiſted by Accident, is monſtrouſly unreaſonable. But that he ſhould alſo have fallen by Accident, juſt into that

[a] Mark vi. 2. [b] Matth. xiii. 55.

ſingle

ſingle Country, in which there was a Syſtem of Religion, that he could build on, with a Series of Predictions applicable to himſelf; and juſt at that Period too, which theſe Predictions had ſo pointed out, as to raiſe an univerſal Expectation of him: that under all the Diſadvantages of a low Condition he ſhould have Spirit enough to make and maintain the higheſt of Claims, Sagacity enough to interpret the ancient Oracles in a much ſublimer and juſter Senſe, than any of the moſt learned Inſtructors of the People, and Self-denial enough to prefer, in Conſequence of theſe Interpretations, Perſecution and Crucifixion before the Safety of a private Station, or the Splendor of offered Dominion: that every one of theſe Things, (and others equally ſtrange might be added) ſhould meet in the ſame Man, without the eſpecial Appointment of Heaven, exceeds all Power of Chance. Conſider him only as a mere Man, he appears to have been unſpeakably the greateſt and beſt of Men. Conſider only thoſe Conſequences of his coming into the World, which even Unbelievers muſt acknowledge, he appears to be the moſt important Perſon, that ever did come into it. The general Reaſonableneſs of his Doctrine,

the Coolneſs of his Temper, the Compoſedneſs and Familiarity of his whole Converſation, prove he was no Enthuſiaſt: the unvaried Goodneſs of his Life, the Willingneſs with which he ſuffered Death, the Impoſſibility, which his Underſtanding could not but ſee, of attaining any worldly Advantage by the Courſe, which he took; nay indeed, the Difficulties which he left in ſome Articles of his Scheme, and needed not, if he had contrived it to ſerve a Turn, prove full as evidently, that he was no Impoſtor. What muſt he have been then? And what elſe can we gather from his whole Behaviour, than what the Spectators did from the finiſhing Scene of it upon the Croſs: *Truly this was the Son of God*[c]?

But if indeed a Title ſo tranſcendent belongs to *Jeſus*, we are ſurely bound to learn, with the utmoſt Docility, from the Scriptures written by his Direction, what it comprehends, and what is connected with it. There we read, that *in the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*[d]: that by him the Father created all Things, and by him hath conducted, ever ſince, the Concerns of this World; whence he is called, in the Text, *the Author and Finiſher of our Faith.*

[c] Matth. xxvii. 54. [d] John i. 1.

He laid the Ground-work of it immediately on the Fall of our first Parents, the Consequences of which we all feel, in the gracious Intimation given them, that *the Seed of the Woman*[e] should destroy the Serpent's Power: and afterwards made valuable Additions to it of *precious Promises*[f] from Time to Time. When Idolatry and Vice had overspread the rest of the World; he preserved it with peculiar Care in one Nation, *as a Light shining in a dark Place*[g], for the Benefit of all, who would turn their Eyes towards it; and, by a Chain of wonderful Providences, brought on the proper Season for diffusing it throughout the Earth. Then he divested himself of *the Glory, which he had with the Father before the World was*[h]; *the Word became Flesh, and dwelt amongst us*[i]: taught Men in Person the great Truths of Religion, confirmed them by beneficent Miracles performed, and illustrious Prophecies fulfilled; exemplified them, as I have said, in his Practice; and provided the Means of their descending uncorrupted to all future Ages, and being efficaciously applied to the Conviction of the Wicked, and the Comfort of the good. So fully is he, and he

e Gen. iii. 15. f 2 Pet. i. 4. g Verse 19.
h John xvii. 5. i John i. 14.

could not be more fully, what the Apoſtle calls him: who next reminds us, that in carrying on this inconceivably kind Work, he willingly underwent all Manner of ill Uſage, and at length *endured* the Pain, and *deſpiſed the Shame, of the Croſs*, inflicted on him by Wretches, for whom his Precepts were too holy, and his Life too harmleſs; that ſo he might demonſtrate his Sincerity, and ſet a Pattern of doing the hardeſt Things, which he taught. Nay, he ſubmitted farther, to become the Repreſentative of Tranſgreſſors; to be forſaken of God, and have his Soul made ſorrowful unto Death, in that myſterious Diſpenſation of laying on him the Iniquities of us all: in order to give the moſt tremendous Proof of the Heinouſneſs of Sin; that ſuch a one as he ſhould ſuffer ſo much, to induce the juſt and wiſe, though equally merciful, Ruler of all to forgive it, and engage and enable the guilty to forſake it.

Theſe Things he did, the Text goes on to ſay, *for the Joy that was ſet before him:* the Joy of illuſtrating at once the Holineſs and Goodneſs of God, who appointed and accepted this Method of our Salvation: the Joy of reforming and making happy, in themſelves

and one another, in Time and to Eternity, all thoſe Multitudes, who in every Generation ſhould embrace his Offers; and laſtly, the Joy of being deſervedly honoured, as the bleſſed Inſtrument of theſe ineſtimable Benefits.

Accordingly he hath the Honour, as the Apoſtle proceeds to obſerve, of ſitting down at the right Hand of the Throne of God: being placed, in Reſpect of that Nature which he condeſcended to aſſume, and the Sufferings of which are thus properly rewarded, in a State of ſupreme Felicity, at the Head of the whole Creation, *Angels and Authorities being made ſubject unto him*[k]. And in this exalted Station he ſhall remain, ſuperintending the Affairs of the Univerſe, till he returns to our Earth at the Day of Judgment. Then *every Eye ſhall ſee him, and they alſo which pierced him*[l], they which blaſpheme him, and they which, profeſſing, yet *obey not his Goſpel: who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting Deſtruction from the Preſence of the Lord, when he ſhall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*[m].

This then is he, to whom we are directed to look: to *look off*, for ſo the Word ſignifies,

k 1 Pet. iii. 22. l Rev. i. 7. m 2 Theſſ. i. 8, 9, 10.

from other Objects, unsafe or unworthy, and contemplate him: not only as the most excellent of Men, but a Being raised *far above every Name that is named*, either *in this World, or that which is to come*[n]: nor only as thus eminent in himself, but as our greatest Benefactor and truest Friend; our wise Lawgiver and spotless Example; the Sacrifice by whose Blood we are washed from our Sins; the Head of the Body, of which we are Members; the Judge, on whose Sentence our everlasting State depends: our Prophet, our Priest and our King; our Saviour, *our Lord and our God*[o].

Surely of such a one it seems impossible to think lowly: and almost unavoidable to think often and much. Yet were we to examine ourselves, how frequently or how seldom we recollect his Perfections, and our most interesting Relations to him; whether we are strongly or slightly affected by them; whether we principally attend to his Rules of Life, or those which are suggested by inconsiderate Custom, vicious Inclination, or vain Self-Opinion, falsely called Reason; whether, even if we mean to do well, we pray with Humility for his Grace, or trust our own imagined

[n] Eph. i. 21. [o] John xx. 28.

Strength;

Strength; and laſtly, whether after *doing all* we can, we rely on his Merits, as *unprofitable Servants*[p], or hope for Salvation by our own ſinful good Deeds; what Anſwer muſt the Conſciences of many of us make? Such undoubtedly as will at leaſt evidence the Need of fixing our Thoughts upon him much more ſteadily, than we have done; of ſtirring up in our Hearts the warmeſt Sentiments of Reverence, Gratitude and Love towards him; (for who can be equally intitled to them, or what Employment ſo delightful or beneficial?) and of exerting them in every Act, which he hath appointed, or his Followers found ſerviceable. External Acts of themſelves indeed are Nothing: but when they proceed from a good Principle within, and are choſen and uſed with Diſcretion, they keep up the Vigour of the Mind, and ſtrengthen good Habits inexpreſſibly. The Importance of them in civil Affairs is every where acknowledged: and how can we fancy it to be leſs in religious? Therefore if indeed we honour our Redeemer, we muſt ſhew that we honour his Sacraments, his Ordinances, the weekly, the yearly Days conſecrated to him, the Places of his Worſhip: permit me to add, his Miniſters, only

[p] Luke xvii. 10.

being careful to diſtinguiſh, for the Sake of our Maſter and of Mankind, the devout, the laborious, the diſintereſted, from the Lovers of Pleaſure or Gain, of Power or Applauſe, from the formal, the thoughtleſs, the lukewarm.

Nor will he, whoſe Reſpect to *the Author and Finiſher of our Faith* is real, either ſeek or wiſh to ſhelter himſelf from infidel Scorn by leaving the Motives of his Conduct in religious Matters doubtful: but openly, though decently, make it known to all Men, of which Side he in Truth is; and do at leaſt as much for the Cauſe of God, as he could with Propriety for any other, that he hath at Heart: recollecting that thus the pious will be animated, the Oppoſers ſtaggered, the indolent awakened; and likewiſe, that them only *who confeſs him before Men, will Jeſus confeſs before his Father which is in Heaven*[q].

But Zeal for his Miſſion and Doctrines will be of no Avail, without Imitation of his Example and Obedience to his Laws. As on the one Hand, the Virtue which Men profeſs without Religion, the Religion which they profeſs without Chriſtianity, the Chriſtianity which they profeſs without Affection to

[q] Matth. x. 32.

Chriſt,

Chriſt, is eſſentially imperfect, and moſtly nominal: they model it into what they pleaſe, and it waſtes away to Nothing: ſo on the other, not only hypocritical, but partial, Attachment to him, Fondneſs for him as the Obtainer of Pardon and future Happineſs, and Slight of him as the Director of Life; hoping to be ſaved by Faith without Works, or waiting for his Grace to amend us without taking Pains to amend ourſelves; theſe Things *put* his Goſpel and *him to open Shame*[r]. We muſt *look unto Jeſus*, as our Exemplar and Legiſlator: elſe we ſhall look to him in vain as our Saviour.

Some of his Actions indeed were appropriated to his Office; and ſome of his Precepts, to that of his Apoſtles. But whatever was temporary or ſingular in either, is eaſily diſcerned, and the reſt binds us all. Therefore we muſt *learn of him* to be *meek and lowly: for ſo ſhall we find Reſt for our Souls*[s]. We muſt condeſcend, when Occaſion requires, to the meaneſt Inſtances of mutual Service: for *our Maſter and Lord waſhed his Diſciples Feet, that they ſhould do as he had done to them*[t]. We muſt take the moſt injurious Provocations patiently:

[r] Heb. vi. 6. [s] Matth. xi. 29. [t] John xiii. 5, 13, 15.

for he, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*[u]. We must *forgive one another, as God for Christ's Sake* is ready to *forgive us*[w]. We must *speak the Truth every Man with his Neighbour*[x], for there *was no Guile found in his Mouth*[y]. We must be *harmless and undefiled, separate from Sinners*[z], in our Temper and Practice, even when obliged to be most in their Company; for so was he, conversing with them, as a Physician with the sick. In a Word, *the same Mind* must *be in us, which was in Christ Jesus*[a] our Lord.

And we must not only avoid gross Transgressions and Omissions; but *purify ourselves as he is pure*[b], and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God*[c]. Ambition, Worldliness, Delicacy, Voluptuousness, Dissipation, Eagerness for Amusements and Trifles, are utterly beneath us, and unsuitable to our Profession. A Christian is a Character of Dignity: and though he submits with a graceful Willingness to whatever his Condition here demands: yet he *sets his Affection* only *on the Things above*[d]; and

[u] 1 Pet. ii. 23. [w] Eph. iv. 32. [x] Eph. iv. 25.
[y] 1 Pet. ii. 22. [z] Heb. vii. 26. [a] Phil. ii. 5.
[b] 1 John iii. 3. [c] 2 Cor. vii. 1. [d] Col. iii. 2.

 from

from the View of his Redeemer placed there at the right Hand of God, draws his Directions for his Conduct below: reasoning with St. *Paul*, *The Love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again*[e].

Such as are duly moved by this Consideration will faithfully perform, not only the general Duties of Life, but the particular ones of their Rank and Circumstances. Persons in Authority will reflect, that he who is *Lord of Lords*[f], and *the Prince of the Kings of the Earth*[g], hath deputed them for a Work, similar to his own final one, *the Punishment of Evil-doers, and the Praise of them that do well*[h]; and consequently will inform themselves concerning both. *He needed not*, when upon Earth, *that any should testify of Man; for he knew what was in Man*[i]. But sagacious Inquiry and strict Observation are necessary for their executing that noble Plan, which *David* hath laid down for them in the 101st Psalm. Happy the Nation, where it is pursued with

[e] 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. [f] Rev. xvii. 14. [g] Rev. i. 5.
[h] 1 Pet. ii. 14. [i] John ii. 25.

Gentleness

Gentleneſs and Candor, yet with Spirit and Efficacy, that the ill-inclined *may hear and fear, and do no more preſumptuouſly*[k].

Again: the Miniſters of the Goſpel, if they look unto and *love the Lord Jeſus in Sincerity*[l], will imitate his Aſſiduity in giving Inſtruction, his Compaſſion to Penitents, his plain Denunciations againſt obſtinate Sinners, his Contempt of unjuſt Reproach, yet his Caution to guard againſt needleſs Offence: will accommodate their Diſcourſes, as he did, to the Wants, the Diſpoſitions, the Capacities of their Hearers; *condeſcending* in this and all Things *to Men of low Eſtate*[m]: will remember, that *his Kingdom is not of this World*[n], and uſe whatever Advantages they enjoy in it, to the Purpoſes of the next: be in every good Senſe, as he was, but in no bad one, *the Friends of Publicans and Sinners*[o]; neither act *as being Lords over God's Heritage, but enſamples to the Flock, that when the chief Shepherd ſhall appear, they may receive a Crown of Glory*[p]. *Wherefore holy Brethren, Partakers of the heavenly Calling, conſider the Apoſtle and High-Prieſt of our Profeſſion*[q].

[k] Deut. xvii. 13. [l] Eph. vi. 24. [m] Rom xii. 16. [n] John xviii. 36. [o] Matth. xi. 19. [p] 1 Pet. v. 3, 4. [q] Heb. iii. 1.

Further

Further yet: thoſe who have large Incomes, if they fix their Thoughts on him, *who for our Sakes became poor, that we, through his Poverty, might become rich*[r] *in good Works*[s] and heavenly Treaſures, will be powerfully excited not to place their Happineſs, either in the Acquiſition or Poſſeſſion of Wealth, or the Enjoyment of any of thoſe Pleaſures which Wealth can help to procure: but in doing Good, as the bleſſed *Jeſus* did, and benefiting their *Brethren for whom he died*[t]. To do this more effectually, they will ſet an Example of prudent Self-reſtraint and Frugality, which may preſerve Multitudes of others, if not themſelves from Follies and Diſtreſſes: they will employ what is thus ſaved in Acts of judicious Charity; and have conſtantly in their Minds what many, who are extremely liberal, ſtrangely forget, that all Expences, and ſeeming Bounties, which tend to corrupt Morals, are miſchievous; and uſing Methods to make Men pious and virtuous, providing for their Souls at the ſame Time with their Bodies, which our Saviour did continually, conduces beyond all Things even to their preſent Welfare.

[r] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [s] 1 Tim. vi. 18. [t] Rom. xiv. 10, 15.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, they who are afflicted, (and who is not often ſo in one Reſpect or another?) if they dwell, as the Text was meant to adviſe them particularly, on the Contemplation of our compaſſionate High-Prieſt, *the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*[u], will learn from him to endure *all the Contradiction of Sinners*, and all *the heavy Yoke* that is laid *on the Sons of Adam*[w], Diſeſteem, Ingratitude, Perverſeneſs, Inſolence, Diſappointment, Poverty, Pain and Death, without being *weary or faint in their Minds*[x]. He, though faultleſs, endured much more than we Sinners ſhall be called to: under every Trial *his Grace will be ſufficient for us*[y]: *if we ſuffer with him, we ſhall alſo reign with him*[z]; the more we undergo, the greater will be our Reward: and what have we then to reſent or fear or be dejected about, or whom to envy? Miſerable Comforts are all the worldly Means, by which Men labour in vain to deceive themſelves, and mitigate their Wretchedneſs, compared with the *everlaſting Conſolation and good Hope, which our Lord Jeſus Chriſt hath given us*[a], whoſe Words are, *To him that overcometh will I grant to ſit with*

u Iſ. liii. 3. w Ecclus. xl. 1. x Heb. xii. 3.
y 2 Cor. xii. 9. z 2 Tim. ii. 12. a 2 Theſſ. ii. 16.

me

me in my Throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his Throne[b].

Let every one therefore of every Degree *fight the good Fight of Faith, and lay hold on eternal Life, whereunto he is called*[c]: for these are *not cunningly devised Fables*[d], but *the true Sayings of God*[e]. They who have hitherto lived in Sin, (and so far we all have, that *by* his Obedience to *the Law no Man is justified in the Sight of God*[f]) let them *flee* to the merciful Jesus *from the Wrath to come*[g], *acquaint themselves with him, and be at Peace*[h]. They that once had a Sense of Religion, but *have left their first Love*[i], drawn away by vicious Indulgences, or temporal Interests, or *the Instruction that causeth to err from the Words of Knowledge*[k], let them remember from whence they are *fallen, and repent, and do their first Works*[l]. They, who have hitherto persevered in Piety, let them form in themselves, as they will always have Room and Need, a still completer Image of Christ. And let us all incessantly study to acquire that constant, that affectionate and influencing Attention to him,

[b] Rev. iii. 21. [c] 1 Tim. vi. 12. [d] 2 Pet. i. 16. [e] Rev. 19. 9. [f] Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11. [g] Matth. iii. 7. [h] Job xxii. 21. [i] Rev. ii. 4. [k] Prov. xix. 27. [l] Rev. ii. 5.

for

for which St. *Peter* celebrates the early Chriſtians, when he ſaith, *Whom having not ſeen, ye love: in whom, though now ye ſee him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory, receiving the End of your Faith, even the Salvation of your Souls*[m].

[m] 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

SERMON VII.

1 COR. i. 22, 23, 24.

For the Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom;
But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks Foolishness;
But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.

TO expect eternal Life through a Saviour who died for us, is the fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Profession: the Article, that distinguishes our Faith from all others, and with which our Religion stands or falls. The New Testament therefore dwells much on the Importance of this Belief: and especially the Epistles of St. *Paul* inculcate it every where. He *determined*, though a Man of extensive Knowledge, *not to know any Thing among* those whom he instructed, to insist on no Subject, comparatively speaking, *save Christ*

Jesus, and him crucified[a]. Still both he, and the rest of the Apostles, must plainly foresee, and they quickly experienced, as the Preachers of the Gospel have done ever since, that the Prejudices of many, and the Pride of all Men, would find much Difficulty in submitting to owe their Salvation to another; especially to one, who had lived so poor a Life, and suffered so disgraceful a Death; which would all be avoided by teaching them to ascribe the whole Merit of it to themselves. But *they had not so learned Christ*[b], as to *handle the Word of God deceitfully*[c]. They knew, that what seemed to human Vanity weak and ill-judged, was the true and only Way to heavenly Happiness. And therefore, though *the Jews required a Sign*, &c.

In discoursing on these Words, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified*.

II. Whence it came to pass, that this was *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness*.

III. That, notwithstanding, it places in a strong Light both *the Power and the Wisdom of God*.

[a] 1 Cor. ii. 2. [b] Eph. iv. 20. [c] 2 Cor. iv. 2.

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified*. Now this, in one Word, is to lay before Men the Nature and Terms of that *eternal Salvation*, of which, by his suffering on the Cross, he is *become the Author unto all that obey him*[a]. More particularly it is to instruct them in the following great Truths: that there ever hath, doth, and will exist, one infinite Being, perfectly wise, just and good, the almighty Maker and Ruler of the Universe; who created Man for the Practice of Piety and Virtue, and for the Enjoyment of everlasting Life: that our first Parents, by wilfully transgressing a most equitable Command of his, forfeited their Title to Immortality, disordered the Frame of their Bodies and Minds, and derived to us the same corrupt and mortal Nature, to which they had reduced themselves: that being in this Condition through their Fault, all Men sunk into a still worse, by committing many Sins, which, however prone to them, they might have had the Means of avoiding; and thus have deserved Punishment here and hereafter: that, Wickedness prevailing early, and spreading wide in the World, first the Practice, then the Knowledge, both of true Reli-

[a] Heb. v. 9.

gion and moral Virtue, were in a great Meaſure loſt out of it: but that the unſpeakable Mercy and Wiſdom of the Supreme Being provided a Remedy for theſe Evils, intimated in general Terms to the earlieſt Offenders, promiſed more diſtinctly in the ſucceeding Ages, and actually given *when the* proper *Fulneſs of Time came*[e]; which Remedy was this. A Perſon, made known under the Character of the only-begotten Son of God, and one with the Father in a Manner to us incomprehenſible, after teaching Mankind from the Beginning by various other Methods, took upon him our Nature, was born of a Virgin, and dwelt on Earth, to teach us perſonally by his Word and Example: condeſcended, for this compaſſionate Purpoſe, to all the Inconveniences of the preſent State of Things, to numberleſs Indignities and Sufferings, and laſtly to have his Life taken away by the Hands of wicked Men; *humbling himſelf unto Death, even the Death of the Croſs*[f], uſually inflicted on none but the vileſt and loweſt of Malefactors. In Conſideration of this meritorious Goodneſs of his, which he engaged, before the World began, thus to manifeſt, the moſt High eſtabliſhed with him

[e] Gal. iv. 4. [f] Phil. ii. 8.

a Cove-

a Covenant of Grace and Favour, by which *all Power in Heaven and Earth was given him*[g]; and Provision was made, that whoever should sincerely repent of the Sins which he had committed, and throw himself on the promised Mercy of God; whether as more obscurely notified before the Redeemer's Incarnation, or more clearly afterwards; taking the Word of Truth for the Law of his Life, and faithfully endeavouring to obey it, should not only have Pardon for his past Transgressions, however heinous, but the Assistance of the divine Spirit to preserve him from future ones: that a kind Providence should turn every Thing to his Good, which befell him in this World, and endless Felicity be his Portion in the next. But then it was also denounced, that whoever should either slight these Offers when duly made; or, professing to accept them, live unsuitably to them, Christ should be of no Benefit to such; they should remain in their Sins, with this heavy Aggravation of their Guilt, that they had rejected the Counsel of God for their Salvation; and when *Light was come into the World, loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil*[h].

[g] Matth. xxxviii. 18. [h] John iii. 19.

This is, in brief, the Doctrine of Christ crucified. The main Parts of it, you see, are two: God's Goodness to us, and our Duty to him: and if either be omitted, Men are not *taught as the Truth is in Jesus*[i]. Insisting on moral Duties only, is overlooking the greatest of all Duties, Piety. Insisting on the Duties of natural Religion only, is injuriously despising those of Revelation, which the same Authority hath enjoined. And laying before Men all the Commandments of God, only omitting to say, how they shall be enabled to perform them, and how they shall procure their Performances, faulty as the best of them are, to be accepted, is failing them in Points of the most absolute Necessity.

But then, on the other Hand, speaking of Nothing, but Christ and his Grace, is concealing what *the Grace of God appeared unto all Men to teach them: that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World*[k]. It is not therefore naming Christ ever so often, or exalting his Compassion to the fallen Race of *Adam* ever so much, or describing his dreadful Sufferings ever so movingly, that is preaching

[i] Eph. iv. 21. [k] Tit. ii. 11, 12.

him

him as we ought, if all be not directed to make us become like him. His own Sermon on the Mount is almost entirely filled with Precepts of Duty; of the common Duties of common Life. And so may other Sermons too, yet be truly Christian, even without mentioning Christ expresly, provided the Necessity of his Aid and his Merits be understood throughout them; and the great Design of his coming, the Reformation of the Hearts and Lives of Men, be closely pursued in them. Thus then judge of our Discourses: and, which is of more Importance, thus judge of your own Improvement. It is neither talking nor thinking highly of Christ, nor being affected in the tenderest Manner with his bitter Passion and dying Love, that constitutes a Believer in him, such as he will finally own: but *herein* may *we have Boldness in the Day of Judgement*, if, *as he was*, *so are we in this World*[l].

Yet still the Sacrifice of him, *as a Lamb without Blemish*[m], for our Sins, the Need we had of it, and the Benefits we receive from it, are such capital and indispensable Articles, that every Preacher, who doth not frequently return to them, is without Excuse: and every

[l] 1 John iv. 17. [m] 1 Pet. i. 19.

Professor of Christianity, who doth not *live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him, frustrates his Grace*[n], and will *come short of his Glory*[o]. Accordingly, though St. *Paul* himself hath considerable Parts of Chapters, in which little, if any Thing, is said of our Saviour; yet all prepares the Way for introducing him again; all points our Eye to him; all makes Part of that Building, *the Corner Stone* of which *is Jesus Christ*[p].

Having thus explained, what *preaching Christ crucified* is, I proceed to shew,

II. Why this Doctrine was *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness:* which the Words of the Text, when unfolded, will tell us plainly. *The Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom.*

The former had been delivered from the Bondage of *Egypt by Signs and Wonders, by a mighty Hand and a stretched out Arm*[q]. A glorious Appearance of God upon Mount *Sinai* had accompanied the Promulgation of their Law: his visible Presence had dwelt with them, first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple; his miraculous Interpositions had

[n] Gal. ii. 20, 21. [o] Rom. iii. 23. [p] Eph. ii. 20.
[q] Deut. iv. 34. v. 15.

given, preserved, and restored to them the Land of *Canaan*, with much earthly Prosperity. These Blessings had so powerfully struck the Imaginations of a gross and carnal People, that they paid in general but little Attention to any that were not of a temporal Nature. And therefore whenever their Prophets foretold the Coming of the promised Redeemer, they were obliged, unless they would have their Predictions despised and forgotten, to describe him in Terms, literally denoting worldly Grandeur: as *ruling in the Midst of his Enemies, judging among the Heathen* [r], and *higher than the Kings of the Earth* [s]. They did however join to these Descriptions such Circumstances, as sufficiently determined their Words to a spiritual Meaning. But still the other, being far more agreeable, was always uppermost in the Thoughts of the *Jews*: and they would image to themselves the expected Son of *David*, as a mighty Conqueror, who should prove himself the true Messiah by supernatural Assistances from above, enabling him to exert a more than human Force against the Nations, which held them in Subjection, and extend the *Jewish* Empire over the Globe.

[r] Ps. cx. 2, 6. [s] Ps. lxxxix. 27, 28.

In this Senſe it was, that they *required a Sign*[t]. Other Signs of his Miſſion our Saviour had ſhewn without Number: but ſtill they demand to *ſee a Sign from Heaven*[u]. Every Miracle is a Sign from Heaven, had they conſidered rightly. But the Sign, on which their Hearts were ſet, was that in the Book of *Daniel:* when the *Son of Man ſhould come with the Clouds of Heaven, and be brought near to the Ancient of Days; and have given to him Dominion and Glory, and a Kingdom, that all People, Nations and Languages ſhould ſerve him*[w]. Our Saviour obſerved their Miſtake, and told them, that the Sign, which they deſired, ſhould indeed be *given,* but *not to that Generation:* that the principal Evidence, to be afforded them, was *the Sign of the Prophet Jonas*[x]: the Reſurrection of *Jeſus* the third Day from the Grave, as *Jonas* roſe from the Depth of the Sea. To following Ages farther Signs were to be vouchſafed in their Order: the Dominion, which they expected to ſee eſtabliſhed at once, was deſigned to take Place

t And a Sign of this Sort they expected, even when the Temple was burnt by the *Romans.* For that very Day a falſe Prophet aſſured the People, ὡς ὁ Θεος επι το ιερον αναβηναι κελευει, δεξομενους τα σημεια της σωτηριας. Joſeph. B I. l. 6. c. 5. §. 2. Ed. Haverc. In a few Lines after, he ſtiles this, προσμενειν την απο τȣ Θεȣ βοηθειαν.

u Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. Luke xi. 16.

w Dan. vii. 13, 14.

x Matth. xii. 39.

bv

by Degrees, over the Souls and Confciences of Men, not their Bodies and Fortunes merely: and in this nobleft Senfe, *the Kingdoms of this World were to become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chrift*[y]. But at Length the Time will come for a yet more awful Difplay of his regal Power, in the laft Judgement: and then fhall they, who were fo prematurely impatient for a Sign from Heaven, *fee*, before they wifh it, *the Sign of the Son of Man coming in the Clouds, with Power and great Glory*[z].

But fuch Reprefentations were likely to have little Effect on fuch Minds. One, who fhould *at that Time reftore again the Kingdom to Ifrael*[a], was what the whole People wanted. And when they not only beheld the Meannefs of our Saviour's Appearance, and heard the Meeknefs of his Doctrine, but faw how carefully he avoided the Opportunities of obtaining an earthly Kingdom, the leading Part of the Nation immediately denied him. But when he was arraigned and condemned, and fuffered the Death of a Slave; then the Faith, even of his Apoftles, almoft died with him. *We trufted*, fay two of his Difciples, as if now all Hope was at an End, *we trufted, that it had*

y Rev. xi. 15. z Matth. xxiv. 30. a Acts i. 6.

been

been he which should have redeemed Israel[b]. It is true, they recovered themselves: but the greater Part of the *Jews* did not: and a crucified Redeemer continues *a Stumbling-block* to them; or, in the Words of *Simeon*, a *Sign spoken against, set for the Fall and Rising again of many in Israel*[c]: indeed for the utter Fall of that Church and Nation, till the Season foretold shall come, for which Providence hath left Room, by the wonderful Preservation of this one and only People distinct from all others for so many Ages, when by *looking on him whom they have pierced, and mourning*[d], they shall rise again, and be as *Life from the dead*[e].

As for the *Greeks*, or Gentiles, they did not object to the Gospel, that the Authority of it wanted the Proof of Signs from Heaven; but that the Preaching of it wanted the Recommendation of what they called *Wisdom*. Neither the Manner of the Apostles Teaching was adorned with that plausible Oratory, of which they were so fond; which soothed the Ears, and entertained the Imagination; which could make a bad Cause victorious, and a good one suspected: nor yet was the Matter of their Discourse made up of curious Specula-

b Luke xxiv. 21. c Luke ii. 34. d Zech. xii. 10. John xix. 37. e Rom. xi. 15.

tions,

tions, abstruse Points in Philosophy debated with Acuteness, Theories, built upon slender Foundations to great Heights, then attacked with subtle Objections, and defended with more subtle Refinements. These were the Delights of the learned *Greeks:* who, as St. *Paul* and indeed their own Writers observe particularly of *the Athenians, spent their Time in Nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new Thing*[f]. Immediately therefore when he had begun to preach in that City, they apply to him with great Eagerness: *May we know, what this new Doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is*[g]? But when they found no such Gratification of their Fancy as they expected; but a grave Reproof of their favourite Superstitions, a serious Call to Repentance, a solemn Denunciation of a future Recompence; and the Foundation of these disagreeable Doctrines laid in a mere Fact, which was contrary to all their Schemes and Systems, that *God would judge the World in Righteousness by that Man, whom he had ordained, whereof he had given Assurance to all Men, in that he had raised him from the dead: some*, we read, *mocked*; and of those, who said more civilly, that *they would hear him*

f Acts xvii. 21. g Verse 19.

again

again of that Matter[h], we have no Cause to believe, that many did. Nor would the principal *Romans* afford to our holy Faith more Attention. For when St. *Paul* was arguing before *Agrippa*, being a *Jew*, from the Prophets, that *Christ was to suffer and rise again*; *Festus*, the Governor, instantly interrupted him: *Paul, thou art beside thyself; much Learning doth make thee mad*[i].

This was the Treatment, which Men, *wise in their own Conceits*[k], and bigotted to their own Opinions, gave the Gospel of Christ. Its Doctrines had Nothing amusing to Minds full of trifling Curiosity: its Precepts had many Things disgusting to human Sensuality and Pride: its Proofs were inconsistent with their prevailing Notions. So it was rejected without Examination by Persons, whom the Irony of *Job* suits perfectly well: *no Doubt, but ye are the People: and Wisdom shall die with you*[l]. It ought to surprize no one, that this Sort of Men, who have always been too common in the World, and never more than now, should scorn Christianity: while they continue such as they are, they cannot embrace it.

[h] Acts xvii. 31, 32. [i] Acts xxvi. 23, 24. [k] Rom. xii. 16. [l] Job xii. 2.

But, God be thanked, there have ever been ſome of more equitable Diſpoſitions: and to theſe it hath conſtantly appeared in that Light, which the Text expreſſes,

III. *But unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Chriſt the Power of God and the Wiſdom of God.* They who would ſuffer the Voice of Reaſon and Revelation to call upon them, and would attend to the Call, quickly diſcovered, under the Meanneſs of Chriſt's Appearance, divine Power; and under the Plainneſs of his Doctrine, divine Wiſdom.

The *Jews* had no Cauſe to expect military Exploits, miraculous Victories, and outward Splendor in their Meſſiah. Their own Prophets had foretold, that he was to *come to them lowly and meek* [m]; *to be deſpiſed and rejected of Men, to pour out his Soul unto Death an Offering for Sin, and make Interceſſion for the Tranſgreſſors* [n]. Of other Sorts of Miracles they had many more, performed by him and his Diſciples, than by *Moſes* and the Prophets. If his Death, for Want of knowing the Scriptures, appeared an Objection; his riſing-again, and Aſcenſion into Heaven, was a full Proof of his Authority. If he brought them no Deliverance

[m] Zech. ix. 9. Matth. xxi. 5. [n] Iſ. liii.

from their temporal Enemies; yet he freed them from infinitely more formidable ones, from Sin and Guilt and the Wrath of God: and instead of a short-lived Tyranny over the Nations of the Earth, he obtained for them an eternal Triumph over Death and Hell; and *made them Kings and Priests unto God, to reign with him for ever and ever*[o]. Thus was he, in much the most important Sense, *the Power of God unto Salvation*[p]: and his real Greatness exceeded all that they looked for, unspeakably more, than his visible Appearance fell beneath it.

As to the Defect of that Wisdom, which the *Greeks* required in the Gospel: it had not indeed *the Wisdom of this World*, or of the vain *Disputers of this World*[q], who *professing themselves to be wise became Fools*[r]: but, void as it appears of Argumentation and Ornament, every single Truth, that can lead Men to Virtue and Happiness, is taught in it much more fully and convincingly, than in all the preceding Institutions either of Philosophy or Religion. The Being, Attributes and Providence of God, the Apostles proved, were *clearly seen, being*

[o] Rev. i. 6. v. 10. xx. 6 xxii. 5. [p] Rom. i. 16.
[q] 1 Cor. i. 20. [r] Rom. i. 22.

understood

understood by the Things that were made[a]: the Nature and Obligation of Piety and Morals, the Forgiveness of Sins upon Repentance, the inward Assistance of divine Grace, the future Happiness of the good, and Punishment of the bad, these Things they did not ingeniously harangue upon, after the beloved Manner of the *Greeks*, and leave them in the same Uncertainty in which they found them, but gave for their Assertions concerning them, the irrefragable Testimony of Miracles which must proceed from the Almighty; and some of them such as, in their Opinion, even the Almighty was unable to perform. For that *God* himself *should raise the dead, was thought a Thing incredible with them*[t]. But as no just Reasoning can shew it to be impossible, it is more certainly his Work for being beyond our Comprehension. And this is that undeniable *Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*, which infinitely excells all *the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*[u], not only in the Strength of its Evidence, but the Efficacy of its Influence too. For after the deepest Philosophers, and most florid Orators had wearied themselves for Ages

[a] Rom. i. 20. [t] Acts xxvi. 8. [u] 1 Cor. ii. 4.

in framing elaborate Discourses about Religion and Virtue, without being able to set up the true Profession of either, so much as in a single Village; the unlearned Disciples of Christ laid, in a few Years, such Foundations of both throughout the World, as have supported them to this Day, and ever will. *For the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than Men* *.

Since therefore the Whole of the Gospel is so firmly proved, and most Parts of it so evidently rational, and no Part of it evidently otherwise; be we ever so incapable of penetrating into the Depths of some Doctrines, and the Reasons of some Proceedings, yet well may it become us to think, that he, who sees all Things, may easily see many, which we do not; and to reverence *the Wisdom of God in a Mystery, even the hidden Wisdom which he ordained before the World, unto our Glory* *. Whether Sinners could be saved no other Way, than by the Death of his Son; or why, if they could, he hath preferred that to the rest; we have no Right to ask. What he hath chosen, we might be sure is best, even did no Reason at all for it appear. But he hath made known

* 1 Cor. i. 25. * 1 Cor. ii. 7.

several

ſeveral to us: ſome clearly, ſome *as through a Glaſs darkly* [y]; but the obſcureſt of them all to be contemplated with awful Reſpect.

By his eternal Son, God made the World, and hath adminiſtered it from the Beginning. He therefore was plainly the fit Perſon to conduct the moſt important of all its Affairs, the Recovery of Mankind from Sin and Miſery; *that in all Things*, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *he might have the Pre-eminence, and in him all Fulneſs dwell* [z]. In Order to recover and reform Men, he muſt inſtruct them: and doing it himſelf was unqueſtionably the moſt efficacious Method. But how muſt he come to do it? Had he appeared in a Station of Power and Wealth; many would have been ready to pay Court to him: but few, to obey his Precepts from the Heart. Even in his low Eſtate, ſome followed him a while, merely for the Loaves. And how much more Hypocriſy, a very improper Qualification for the Kingdom of Righteouſneſs, would there have been amongſt his Hearers, had the Circumſtances of the Teacher been more inviting? And how unſurmountable a Diſgrace might they have

[y] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [z] See Col. i. 13—20.

brought upon his whole Undertaking in its very Infancy, instead of the Honour and Support which it received from the unimpeached Integrity of its first afflicted Professors!

But further: Nothing enforces Precepts, like Example. Now what Example could the Messias have set, in the Midst of worldly Pomp and Grandeur? A very useful one certainly in some Points to some of his chief Officers, and others about his Person: but removed from the Sight, and unsuitable to the Condition of the Bulk of Mankind: whereas in the Sort of Life, which he chose, an extremely public, though a mean one, he was a daily and familiar Pattern to all Men, of the most general and difficult Virtues: of Condescension, Disinterestedness, and Delight to do Good; of Indifference to worldly Enjoyments, Composedness under Contempt, Meekness under malicious Provocations, and Resignation to God's Will under the bitterest Sufferings of every Kind. These Things, most of us, in one Part or another of our Pilgrimage, have Need to practise: and we find them so hard to learn, that the Encouragement of his having done and born much more than he requires of us, and the Assur-

ance,

ance, that *having been tempted* himſelf, he will *ſuccour us when we are tempted*[a], will, in a Time of Trial, be Bleſſings unſpeakable.

Then conſider beſides, how great a Confirmation his Humility and Patience add to the other Proofs of his Authority. A Claim to worldly Power, by Virtue of a divine Commiſſion, raiſes Apprehenſions of unfair Deſign. But when a Perſon, declaring himſelf to come from Heaven, renounces every Thing on Earth, which Men uſually hold dear; when he ſhews by plain Facts, that his Errand is, *not to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter, and to lay down his Life for his* Followers[b]; when he foreſees and foretells, that his Doctrine will bring him to the ſhamefulleſt and cruelleſt of Deaths, and yet goes on, and meets it calmly: here is the ſtrongeſt Evidence of Sincerity; and the moſt engaging Motive to love him, who hath ſo loved us, as to ſeal with his Blood the Truth of the good Tidings, which he came to bring us.

But there is yet one Reaſon more of our Saviour's Paſſion, of which if we ſee not diſtinctly the full Force, we ſee however, that it may be of infinite Force. Mankind are

[a] Heb. ii. 18. [b] Matth. xx. 28.

Sinners. Our firſt Parents were ſo: we have all been ſo, few of us think to what a Degree: and cloſe upon Sin follow Weakneſs and Guilt. The good Inſtructions and Example of our bleſſed Lord have indeed, without any Thing farther, a powerful Tendency to reform us, if we have Strength to reform ourſelves, on ſeeing that we ought. But what can they do for us, if we have not; which Experience too often proves to be our Caſe? Or ſuppoſing them to do it ever ſo effectually; ſtill it would be true, that we have been Sinners; have diſhonoured our Maker, and broken his Laws: and who but himſelf can tell, what Satisfaction the Holineſs of his Nature and the Honour of his Government may demand to be made for ſuch Offences? Mere Sorrow for having done amiſs very ſeldom frees us in this World from the ill Conſequences of Tranſgreſſion: and what Security can we have, that it will in the next? Living well for the future, is making no Amends for having ſinned before: for it is no more than our Duty, if we had never ſinned at all: beſides that what Men call living well, eſpecially Men deſtitute of the Spirit of Chriſt, is mixed with innumerable and grievous Faults. In this State of

Things

Things then, where is the Certainty, that our Sins would or could be forgiven, or the Authority of God kept up in the Eyes of his Creation otherwise, than by punishing the guilty? And if that was to be done, the whole Race of Mankind must fall under the Sentence. Here it was therefore that his unsearchable Wisdom interposed, who, alone knowing the fittest Means of reconciling Justice with Goodness, pitched upon this: that, as a terrifying Monument of the ill Desert of Iniquity, his beloved Son should in our Nature, and in our Stead, suffer Death; and for an eternal Demonstration of the divine Benignity, his undergoing it voluntarily should be rewarded with the highest Glory to himself; and with Pardon, and Grace, and Life eternal to all who made their humble Claim to them, by Repentance; Faith, and Love. Thus did God shew himself *just, and the Justifier of them which believe in Jesus* [c]: thus did *Mercy and Truth meet together; Righteousness and Peace kiss each other* [d].

Assuredly so extraordinary a Method would never have been taken without extraordinary Need of it. That we should fully discern the

[c] Rom. iii. 26. [d] Psal. lxxxv. 10.

Need, is no Way necessary: it suffices that God did. Our Concern is no more, than to accept Salvation, his own Gift, on his own Terms: renouncing all Merit in ourselves, laying hold, by a lively Faith, on the Merits of our Redeemer's Obedience, thanking our heavenly Father from the Bottom of our Souls, for sending his blessed Son into the World, and esteeming most highly the Christian Creed, the Christian Worship, the Christian Sacraments. *God forbid*, then, *that we should glory* in any Thing, *save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*[e]: or ever be ashamed of that, for all the Scorn and Ridicule of a thoughtless and profane World. But God forbid also, that while we profess to believe on him, we should *crucify him to ourselves afresh, and put him* and his Religion *to Shame*[f], by transgressing and neglecting any Obligation of Piety towards our Maker, our Saviour, our Sanctifier; of Justice or Goodness towards our Fellow-Creatures; of Humility, Sobriety, Temperance, Chastity, in the Government of ourselves. For in vain do we *call him Lord*, unless we *do the Things*[g] which he commands

[e] Gal. vi. 14. [f] Heb. vi. 6. [g] Luke vi. 46.

us;

us: in vain do we trust in his Sacrifice, un-
lefs we *prefent our Souls and Bodies*, [illegible]
acceptable unto God: in vain do we imagine
our Peace is made through him in Heaven,
unlefs on Earth we *follow Peace with all Men*,
and that univerfal *Holinefs* of Life, *without
which no Man fhall fee the Lord*[l].

Rom. xii. 1. l Heb. xii. 14.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

1 COR. xv. 19.

If in this Life only we have Hope in Christ, we are of all Men most miserable.

IN the Words preceding these, the Apostle, after setting forth, in several Particulars, the Evidence of our blessed Lord's Resurrection, goes on to prove from it the important Doctrine of a general Resurrection to eternal Life.

It may seem to us now very strange, that any, who called themselves Christians, could make the least Doubt of so known and essential an Article of the Christian Faith. But if we consider the State, in which the World was then, we shall wonder no longer, that, of professed Believers, there should be some, who did not believe the dead would be raised again. Among the *Jews*, the Pharisees indeed were firmly persuaded of this Truth. But the Sadducees, a considerable Sect, though not for the

Numbers,

Numbers, yet for the Rank of thoſe who embraced it, rejected the Doctrine of a future Life intirely; and looked on the Reſurrection, as a Thing peculiarly incredible. Notwithſtanding which, as they held a preſent Providence that rules the World, they might many of them, reading the Predictions of the Old Teſtament concerning the Meſſiah, ſeeing the Accompliſhment of them in the Perſon of *Jeſus*, and ſtruck with the Miracles, which he and his Followers performed, be perſuaded, on the Whole, that he was ſent from God; and yet be very backward to underſtand what he taught, when it contradicted their former Prejudices. But the Heathens were ſtill more likely to act thus. For amongſt them, even the ſteadieſt Believers of a future State all diſbelieved the raiſing again of the Body, as a Thing both impoſſible and unfit: for their Men of Learning thought it only the Priſon of the Soul; which muſt always be an Impediment, inſtead of a Help to it. Suppoſe then Chriſtianity preached, with proper Evidence, to ſuch Perſons as theſe: they would receive very gladly what was ſaid of the Remiſſion of Sins, the Obligations to Virtue, the future Life of the Soul, happy or miſerable, according

ing to every one's Deeds. But when the Resurrection of the Body was taught, there must evidently be great Danger, either that they would reject the Whole of the Gospel, because of this one seemingly incredible Part; as the Philosophers at *Athens* did, who are mentioned in the *Acts*; or else, that they would so interpret this Part, as to reconcile it with their pre-conceived Opinion. Accordingly, the History of the Church informs us, that several, in the first Ages, thought our Saviour died and rose again, not in Reality but in miraculous Appearance only. And others had equally wild Fancies in other Articles of Religion: as indeed it was very natural for them to entertain surprising Imaginations, about Matters so intirely new to them: especially when, in all Likelihood, great Numbers were converted to the Belief of Christianity in general, by seeing or being informed of the Miracles wrought in its Favour; who perhaps had no Opportunity, for some Time, of hearing the particular Doctrines of it explained so distinctly, by those who throughly understood them, as to be set right in every Point. And this may possibly have been one chief Reason of the many strange

Notions,

Notions, that we find ſome of the early Chriſtians embraced.

Beſides, they might the more eaſily be miſtaken, in the Caſe before us, on this Account: that the Apoſtles, imitating the Language, already in Uſe concerning the *Jewiſh* Proſelytes, expreſſed the Change, which Chriſtianity made in the Tempers and Condition of Men, by the Phraſes of *dying to Sin, being buried with Chriſt in Baptiſm, and riſing again to Newneſs of Life*. The ignorant or prejudiced might haſtily conclude from hence, that no other riſing again was intended to be taught: and that therefore *the Reſurrection was paſt already*, as we are told by our Apoſtle, ſome affirmed [a].

Now this Error, if it comprehended the Denial of a future State, ſubverted the main Purpoſe of Chriſtianity: which was, influencing the World to Piety and Virtue, from the Expectation of that State [b]. And where only the future Life of the Body was denied; even that, by Conſequence, made the Goſpel

[a] 2 Tim. ii. 18.

[b] Origen, Com. in Matth. xxii. 23. tom. 17. p. 811. inſiſts, that the Apoſtle writes here againſt Perſons diſbelieving a future Life; and that his Arguments are not concluſive againſt thoſe, who diſbelieve a Reſurrection only. I have endeavoured to ſhew the contrary in what follows.

of no Effect. For if the Resurrection of it was a Thing impossible, which all, who rejected it, seem to have held; then the Resurrection of Christ was a Thing impossible. Yet this was the main Fact, to which the Apostles were appointed to bear Witness, and lay the Stress of their Cause upon it. If therefore they erred here, they deserved Belief in Nothing: their *Preaching was vain, and the Faith* of their Followers *vain also*[c]. Or, supposing Christianity had still sufficient Evidence left; yet, in another Sense, it would be *vain*, that is, ineffectual to the Forgiveness of our Sins; the very Foundation of which is, that *he, who was delivered for our Offences, rose again for our Justification*[d]. If therefore he is not risen, we are not justified: it appears not, that his Death was more than that of a common Man; he continues under the Power of it, not able to help himself, much less others; and human Kind remains, as it was before, liable to future Punishment, and uncertain of future Reward. This is the Apostle's Reasoning, just before the Text: *If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your Faith is vain, ye are yet in your Sins*[e]. He goes on: *Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ,*

[c] 1 Cor. xvi. 14. [d] Rom. iv. 25. [e] 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17.

are perished[f]. Neither dying in the Christian Faith, nor dying for it, can do them Good with Respect to a future Life. And *if in this Life only we have Hope in Christ*, as very probably some of the Sadducee Converts might think, *we are of all Men most miserable*: or, as the original Word strictly signifies, *most pitiable*.

Now, of what Persons this is said, and on what Account it is true of them, a great Doubt hath been raised.

Some have gone so far, as to affirm, that, in the present World, Brutes are happier than Men, and bad Men than good. But of the former of these Points, at least, plainly, the Apostle saith Nothing. Others understand him to mean, that the Condition of moral Heathens in this Life is better than that of Christians, because of the difficult Duties, and severe Restraints, which are peculiar to the latter. But evidently he doth not say at all, what the Condition of any Persons actually is: but only what it would be, if they had not the Hope of hereafter to support them. And therefore, with that Hope, good Men, and good Christians, may, even at present, be happier than others: though it were true, that, without it, they would be more miserable. Not

[f] Verse 18.

that

that he meant to affirm, that they would be more miserable, were the Prospect of a better State out of the Question. Far from it.

Read but the Description, which he gives of the vicious Part of the Heathen World, in the Beginning of his Epistle to the *Romans*: where he tells us, *God had given them over to a reprobate Mind, to do those Things, which are not convenient; being filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness, Covetousness, Maliciousness, Envy, Murder, Strife, Deceit, Malignity; without Understanding, without natural Affection, implacable, unmerciful*[g]. Could he possibly think this a happy State? He appeals to their own Experience for the contrary: *What Fruit had ye then in those Things, whereof ye are now ashamed*[h]? Heathen Vices then he did not think at all conducive to the Enjoyment of Life: nor doth he ever intimate, that Heathen Virtues were more so, than Christian Graces. So far as they are both the same, they must have the same Effects: and there are few Cases, if any, in which the Gospel, rightly understood, is more strict than Reason, duly cultivated: besides that those Precepts of it, which are the strictest of all, perhaps contribute the most of all to our Hap-

[g] Rom. i. 28—31. [h] Rom. vi. 21.

pineſs here; by ſtriking at the Root, from whence our Faults and Uneaſineſſes ſpring, and requiring of us that inward Self-government, which is the only Means of true Self-enjoyment. There is alſo another exceeding great Advantage of Chriſtian Virtue; that the Goſpel affords ſuch peculiar Evidences and Means of God's Grace and Aſſiſtance, in Proportion as we need it, to do every Thing, to which he calls us; that though we were not to add the Conſideration of his rewarding us hereafter, yet Believers would undoubtedly be capable of going through the ſame Difficulties with much greater Spirit, Comfort, and Succeſs, than other Men. And accordingly our Saviour aſſures us, that *his Yoke is eaſy, and his Burthen light*[i]. And St. *Paul* yet more diſtinctly aſſerts, that *Godlineſs*, meaning certainly Chriſtian Godlineſs, *is profitable unto all Things, having Promiſe of the Life that now is*, as well as *that which is to come*[k].

But of whom can it be then, that he ſpeaks, when he ſaith ſo expreſſly, *If in this Life only we have Hope in Chriſt, we are of all Men moſt miſerable?* I anſwer, of the very ſame, whom he denoted, by the word *We*, the laſt Time he uſed it, but a few Lines before: of the Witneſſes of

[i] Matth. xi. 30. [k] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Christ's Resurrection, and the Preachers of his Gospel; who then suffered many Afflictions on Account of it in this Life; and were wretched indeed, if they had no Prospect of being the better for it in another: as were certainly in Proportion also their first Followers. For in that Age, *all that lived godly in Christ Jesus suffered Persecution*[l]; and *knew*, as the Apostle reminds them, that *they were appointed thereunto*[m].

Not those Duties therefore, which always belonged to the Christian Profession, but those Sufferings, which then attended it, were the Reason, that, had not the Hopes of a better Life through Christ supported them, they had been *the most miserable of all Men*. And this appears more plainly yet from the Sequel of the Discourse; where, resuming this Part of the Subject again, he doth not argue, *If the dead rise not*, why do we live soberly and righteously; as he doubtless ought to have done, if Sobriety and Righteousness were prejudicial in this World; but, *If the dead rise not, why stand we in Jeopardy every Hour*[n]*? What advantageth it me, that I have fought with Beasts at Ephesus, if the dead rise not*[o]*?*

[l] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [m] 1 Thess. iii. 3. [n] 1 Cor. xv. 30.
[o] Verse 32.

He doth indeed, after this, immediately ſubjoin, *Let us eat and drink; for To-morrow we die.* But theſe Words, in the Paſſage of *Iſaiah*[p], from whence they are taken, ſtand in Oppoſition, not to Temperance, but to Mortification and Faſting. And here they do not mean, let us indulge Debauchery and Exceſs: but let us not deprive ourſelves, if we can hope for no future Advantage from it, of the innocent Satisfactions and Comforts of Life, while it laſts. The Expreſſion may indeed ſometimes be uſed in a bad Senſe: but it is moſt frequently uſed in a good one; as, to mention no more, where our Saviour ſaith of himſelf, that *he came eating and drinking*[q]; and where St. *Paul* pleads, *Have we not Power to eat and to drink*[r]*?* His Intention therefore was only to ſay: If there be no Reſurrection, if Chriſt be not riſen, if his Religion can be of no Service to us hereafter, let us not make ourſelves miſerable for the Sake of it here: let us not ſpend our Lives, as he elſewhere declares he did his, for the Service of the Goſpel, in *Wearineſs and Painfulneſs, in Hunger and Thirſt, in Cold and Nakedneſs*[s]; but, renouncing what only brings on us fruitleſs Sufferings,

[p] Iſ. xxii. 13. [q] Matth. xi. 19. [r] 1 Cor. ix. 4.
[s] 2 Cor. xi. 27.

enjoy

enjoy our Eaſe like other wiſe Men. Theſe Conſequences he knew would ſtartle thoſe, whom he preſſed with them; and ſhew them the Neceſſity, either of abandoning their Faith entirely, which he was certain they would not, or of admitting the Reſurrection for one Article of it.

Upon the Whole then it appears, that the Perſecutions, not the Duties of Chriſtianity, were what would have made the Believers in it miſerable, had the Hope, which it gave them, been confined to this Life. And indeed, though poſſibly God might have appointed, that doing our Duty ſhould be attended of Neceſſity with greater Uneaſineſs and leſs Pleaſure here, than tranſgreſſing it: yet ſuch a Conſtitution of Things would have made his moral Perfections, and his Providence, much more doubtful; for preſent Appearances would then have been altogether againſt them: and this would greatly have diſcouraged the Practice of Virtue; amongſt all Men indeed, but eſpecially in thoſe many Ages and Countries, which had no clear Knowledge, whatever Glimmerings they might have, of a future State.

It is true, ſome excellent Perſons have imagined, that the fewer Advantages they allowed

to Virtue here in their pious Discourses and Writings, the more fully they should prove it must be rewarded hereafter: and therefore have strenuously pleaded for the present Happiness of Vice. But we ought not to state Things otherwise than they are, in order to draw useful Conclusions: and no Good will come of it. Being persuaded, that Wickedness is happier at present, may incline as many to think God is not displeased with it; as any Reasonings from [illegible] will incline to think he [illegible] of Things be contrived by his Providence to favour bad Men more than good now: this may well raise a Doubt, whether the same Providence will so certainly do just the contrary in the next World. And a very small Hope of escaping Punishment there, will effectually determine Men to live as they ought not, if it be acknowledged their Interest here. Or supposing it ever so plain, that if Virtue, on the Whole, suffer in this Life, it must be rewarded in another; yet what we call Virtue in ourselves will be far from intitling us to such Reward. And supposing any Creature faultlessly obedient, the Justice of God will be bound to bestow on it no greater and no longer Reward, than will barely make Amends for its Sufferings. And if we argue

from

from his Goodneſs; his doing ever ſo much for it on Earth, will be no Manner of Objection againſt his doing ſtill more in Heaven. For that will be only carrying on a Scheme, which he hath already begun, and therefore, we may juſtly preſume, he will compleat. If a moral and religious Behaviour be, according to the natural Courſe of Things in this World, beneficial to Men, and a wicked and impious one hurtful; as I hope you have often heard them proved to be: then we have clear Evidence of Fact, that God, who hath made them ſo, doth actually reward the one and puniſh the other. And though at preſent his Recompences are neither exactly proportioned, nor without Exception conſtant: yet, as we ſee many Reaſons, that may juſtly occaſion this, and cannot but acknowledge there may be many more; there ariſes, from the Whole, great foundation for Hope, that the plain Diſtinction, which he made already, will be yet more perfectly made in a proper time. So that there is no Need for us to apprehend we muſt neceſſarily be miſerable here, in order to be happy hereafter; or to lie under the Imputation of depreciating Virtue, and making it good for Nothing to its Votaries, in this World, in Order to ſecure it a Retribution in

the next. Reafon doth not direct to that Method: Revelation hath not taken it: and the Teachers and Profeffors of Chriftianity fhould avoid expofing themfelves to a Charge, from which Chriftianity itfelf is perfectly free.

But ftill, were we to fpeak of Virtue, as always its own Reward here, and attaining its End fufficiently in the Compafs of this narrow Life; that would be an Extreme on the other Hand, and a very pernicious one; whatever great Names have countenanced it, fome with good Defigns, and fome with bad. Such extravagant Praifes of moral Beauty and Excellency will feldom have any other Effect, where they have moft, than raifing an Enthufiafm for it, that will be little more than notional, or an Affectation of it, that will be nothing more than Talk. And with the cooler Part of Mankind, attempting to perfuade them of the contrary to what, in many Cafes, they fee and feel, is lofing all Credit; and making every Thing that is faid to the Advantage of right Conduct fufpicious, by infifting on more, than can poffibly be true.

The real State of the Cafe is plainly this. A Temper and Behaviour of Piety, Juftice, Benevolence, and rational Self-government, is fitted

fitted in its Nature to make our Lives here as happy, as we can make them. And therefore, though we had no farther Profpect, our prefent Intereft would, generally fpeaking, confift in thefe Things: and would always confift in them, if no particular Circumftances happened, to make Exceptions. But the Misfortune is, that fuch Circumftances do frequently happen. Some Men have, from their very Conftitution, peculiarly ftrong Propenfities to Sin, which give them long and painful Exercife; and, after all, can barely be kept under, not rooted out, let them do what they will. Is this a State of Enjoyment, and its own Reward? Or a State of Warfare, that requires a future Recompence, proportionable to the Sufferings of it, to make it eligible? But others are yet more unhappy. They have added evil Habits to evil Inclinations: and, if they will amend their Ways, muft feel deep Remorfe for what they have done amifs already; and go through infinite Difficulties to do right for the Time to come, in Contradiction to all their bad Cuftoms, their inflamed Paffions, their vicious Friends: muft bear great Reproach, perhaps undergo much Lofs, in making Reparation for the Injuries they have committed; when the Whole of this might poffibly have been avoided,

by

tainty as former Ages were in, whether it could be attained or not, must unquestionably mix great Anxiety with their Expectations; and leave their Circumstances, on the Whole, very pitiable. But God, in his Mercy, hath removed all Doubts from us; not only by express Promises, but an experimental Proof also, of a Resurrection to Life everlasting, in the Person of our blessed Lord: that through him we *might have the strongest Consolation, when we fly for Refuge to lay hold on the Hope set before us: which Hope we have as an Anchor of the Soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth within the Veil; whither also the Fore-runner is already entered for us, even Jesus*[w].

You cannot but see then, of what great Consequence it is for all wise Men to encourage this Faith, and all good Men to have frequent Recourse to it. For the principal Reason, why we are, most of us, so faulty and so wretched, in this Life is, that we attend so little to the Rewards of another. We ourselves perhaps do not suspect, how little it is. Would God that every one who hears me, would make a diligent Examination, what Share of his Desires, his Hopes, and his Fears, the unseen World takes up; and seriously ask

[w] Heb. vi. 18—20.

himself,

himſelf, whether it can poſſibly be fit, that the infinitely moſt important Part of his Condition ſhould be allowed ſo very much the leaſt Part in his Thoughts.

But then to think of our Condition to good Effect; we muſt be ſure, not to ſet our Minds more on the Privileges, than the Duties of it; but remember, that as the virtuous would ſometimes be the moſt miſerable of Men, if there were no Expectation of Futurity; ſo the vicious muſt be always the moſt miſerable, if there be any. Every Promiſe of the Goſpel is a Threatening to them: and the Doctrine of Salvation will only condemn them to ſeverer Puniſhments. Let *every Man therefore, who hath Hope in Chriſt, purify himſelf, even as he is pure*[x]. And let every Man who deſires to do ſo, remember, that he can do it only, by a ſtedfaſt Belief, that Chriſt died and roſe again on our Account; *for this is the Victory that overcometh the World, even our Faith*[y]: by an humble Dependance on Grace from above, to be obtained by our Prayers; *for we are not ſufficient of ourſelves to do any Thing*[z]: and by a diligent and conſtant Uſe of

[x] 1 John iii. 3. [y] 1 John v. 4. [z] 2 Cor. iii. 15.

that Grace, in labouring to perform every Part of our Duty; for we are to *work out our own Salvation, because God worketh in us, both to will and to do*[a].

[a] Phil. ii. 12, 13

SER-

SERMON IX.

MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you: All Manner of Sin and Blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto Men: but the Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto Men.

And whoſoever ſpeaketh a Word againſt the Son of Man, it ſhall be forgiven him: but whoſoever ſpeaketh againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come.

THESE Words of our bleſſed Lord ſeldom, if ever, fail to excite a peculiar Attention and Alarm in the Minds of all, who read or hear them: and the Doctrine, which they contain, appears to ſome, either ſo difficult to be underſtood, or ſo improper to be admitted; and fills others with ſuch Terrors, or ſinks them into ſuch Deſpon-

dency; that, for the Sake of great Numbers, it ſhould be well explained from Time to Time. And Men ought to have the Nature of this Crime laid before them, when they are not diſturbed within by the Imagination of having committed it. For when they are, the Agitation of their Minds too commonly diſqualifies them from judging rightly concerning either the Senſe of the Text, or even their own Actions.

Now there are ſeveral Sins againſt the Holy Ghoſt, mentioned in Scripture; *Lying to*[a], *reſiſting*[b], *tempting*[c], *grieving*[d], *quenching the Spirit*[e]: yet none of theſe is ever ſaid to be unpardonable; and therefore, we may be ſure, none of them is ſo: becauſe, if it had, undoubtedly the Word of God would have given us that Warning in Relation to it: whereas on the contrary, the Text itſelf, in the plaineſt Words, aſſures us, that every Sin is pardonable, excepting one, which is different from all theſe. If then either the wicked, reflecting on their Guilt, or the innocent, overcome with groundleſs Fears, are apprehenſive, that they have committed the Sin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, as

[a] Acts v. 3. [b] Acts vii. 51. [c] Acts v. 9.
[d] Eph. iv. 30. [e] 1 Theſſ. v. 19.

they usually call it, and therefore cannot be forgiven: they should, in the first Place, be asked, or ask themselves, and answer distinctly, what Sin against the Holy Ghost they have committed? What the particular Thing is, that weighs so heavy upon them? For unless it be precisely *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, there is no Pretence for saying, they cannot be forgiven. There are but three Passages in the Bible, that mention this Matter: the Text; Mark iii. 28, 29. and Luke xii. 10: in every one of which, the very same Word, *Blasphemy*, is used; and no other. So that, of whatever Sin else against the divine Spirit they may have been guilty, if they have not been guilty of that, they may undoubtedly be forgiven. And this single Observation, duly attended to, is sufficient to preserve, or even restore, the Quiet of Multitudes. But still too many, for Want of understanding the Nature of the Blasphemy which our blessed Lord here means, may falsely conceive themselves to be chargeable with it: whilst others, of a different Turn, may wonder, or be much offended, at finding so terrible a Denunciation against it: and a third Sort, if they perceive no Danger of actually incurring this Con-

 demnation,

demnation, may by no Means consider, so seriously as they ought, how near it they may come. I shall therefore endeavour to shew,

I. What the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

II. What is intended by his Declaration, that *it shall not be forgiven, neither in this World, nor that to come.*

III. Why he passes so heavy a Sentence on this one Sin.

IV. What Things do, or do not, approach towards it.

I. What the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

Now the Term *Blasphemy*, in the original Language of the New Testament, whence we have derived it into our own, signifies Nothing else, than speaking evil of any one unjustly. And it is frequently used to denote speaking evil of our Equals; but more peculiarly, of our Superiors; and therefore, most eminently, of God the Father Almighty, his Son and Spirit: to which three alone this Expression is confined in our vulgar Tongue. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost therefore is, speaking irreverently and injuriously of the Holy Ghost: which may be done, by vilifying either

either his Perſon, or his Works. But of the former our Saviour doth not ſpeak: for Nothing had happened, which could lead him to it. The *Jews*, whom he was reproving, profeſſed, and had, the higheſt Veneration for the Spirit of God: therefore they had certainly uttered no perſonal Reproaches againſt him: indeed it doth not appear, that they had named him in what gave Riſe to the Declaration, made in the Text. But the Caſe, to lay it before you in the Words of the Goſpel, was this. *There was brought to him one poſſeſſed with a Devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him: and all the People were amazed, and ſaid, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Phariſees heard it, they ſaid, This Fellow doth not caſt out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.* It follows, *And Jeſus knew their Thoughts*[f]. Upon which he argued with them, that deſtroying the Works of the Devil, his Influence over the Bodies and Souls of Men, could not proceed from the Devil himſelf, for that would be overturning his own Kingdom; but evidently ſhewed a Power oppoſite and ſuperior to his: and then he ſubjoined the Words now under Conſideration; which many learned

[f] Matth. xii. 22—25.

Interpreters have understood thus: that such, as were ignorantly led by common Prejudice to speak against Christ, appearing only as a Son of Man; and, taking him for a mere Man, reproached him with being *the Carpenter's Son*[g], or even *gluttonous and a Wine-bibber, and a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*[h]; might, notwithstanding, come to see their Mistake, and be forgiven: but when he performed Miracles, before their Eyes, to rectify their Opinion, as he had just done then; if they reviled these also, ascribing them to the Agency of the Devil, contrary to all Reason, and perhaps to their own Consciences too; (for thus some understand the Observation, that *Jesus knew their Thoughts*;) this was *adding Sin to Sin*[i]; was in Effect imputing Wickedness to the Holy Spirit of God, by representing what was plainly done by him, as done by an evil Being; and should not be pardoned. Nor can it be denied, but this Interpretation seems to be much confirmed by St. *Mark*; who observes, that our Saviour gave them this Warning, *because they said, he had an unclean Spirit*[k].

But still other eminent Men, though they allow, that he *cast out Devils*, as himself ex-

[g] Matth. xiii. 55. [h] Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. [i] If. xxx. 1. [k] Mark iii. 30.

presly

presſly affirms[l], and performed the reſt of his wonderful Works, *by the Spirit of God*, which is the ſame with the Holy Ghoſt; yet remark very truly, that this Phraſe, *the Holy Ghoſt*, theſe Words thus joined, in the Goſpels and Acts never ſignify the Power of working Miracles, but often ſignify the ſpiritual Gifts, of ſpeaking with Tongues and the like, which the Apoſtles received: and that accordingly, though they had long before done many Miracles, as well as their Maſter, we are told notwithſtanding in the New Teſtament, that *the Holy Ghoſt was not yet given*[m]; but promiſed, after our bleſſed Lord's Aſcenſion. From hence then they argue, that conformably to this Manner of ſpeaking, *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt* muſt mean vilifying, not the miraculous Operations, of which the Spirit was the Author then; but the farther Manifeſtations of himſelf, which were ſoon to follow them; and our Saviour muſt deſign in the Text to inform his Oppoſers, that all they had ſaid, and all they ſhould ſay, of him, while he remained on Earth, as a *Deceiver of the People*[n] and even one that *had a Devil*[o], might be forgiven them: but if, when he was gone to the Father;

[l] Matth. xii 28. [m] John vii. 39. [n] John vii. 12.
[o] Matth. xi. 18. Luke vii. 33.

and the *Comforter*, or Advocate, for so it should be translated, *come*[p], by supernatural Gifts to *convince the World of Sin, because they had not believed on him*[q]; if they should go on then to speak evil of these also, their Guilt should never be remitted. And, in Confirmation of this Exposition, they observe further, that Christ, at his Death, prayed the *Father to forgive*[r] his Crucifiers, though at the same Time they reviled and derided both him and his Miracles; *he saved others, himself he cannot save; let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the Cross, and we will believe him*[s]: and that, suitably to his Master's Example, St. *Peter* intreated them afterwards to *repent and be converted, that their Sins might be blotted out*[t], which therefore was yet possible: but when, they still resisted the Holy Ghost, after these fuller Proofs of his Interposition, *contradicting and blaspheming*; then the Apostles *turned* from them, as *unworthy of everlasting Life*, and went *to the Gentiles*[u].

This latter Interpretation, I confess, appears to me the more probable. But, in this they agree: that the Blasphemy, which is pronounced unpardonable, was not speaking evil

[p] John xv. 26. [q] John xvi. 8, 9. [r] Luke xxiii. 34. [s] Matth xxvii. 42. Mark xv. 32. [t] Acts iii. 19. [u] Acts xiii. 45, 46.

of

of the Person of the Holy Ghost, but of the miraculous Powers which he exerted: and the Difference is only, what miraculous Powers are meant; whether those mighty Works, which our Saviour performed by Means of the divine Spirit, while on Earth; or those Gifts, which were poured forth on Men, after he ascended to Heaven: a Question, easy, no Doubt, to be answered then; but of no Importance to us now.

What we are concerned to remark farther is, that our blessed Lord's Denunciation was pointed, not against such Blasphemy or Evil-speaking, as mere Mistake or Inconsiderateness might lead Men into; but such, as proceeded from wilful and deliberate Wickedness: for with this he charges the *Jews*, immediately after the Text: *O Generation of Vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good Things? For out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth speaketh* [w]. Nor doth he pass so dreadful a Sentence on the Use of opprobrious Language, concerning Operations of the Spirit, manifested in distant Places or Times; but concerning Miracles performed, or supernatural Gifts exercised, before Mens own Eyes; for that Ad-

w Matth. xii. 34.

vantage they, to whom he spoke, enjoyed. Nor did even they fall under this Condemnation for every hasty Expression of Contempt; but for such, as they continued to utter, after a sufficient Time allowed them to grow cool and serious, and reflect. For when, upon the Apostles receiving the Gift of Tongues, there were some, that *mocking said, These Men are full of new Wine* *; though it was certainly a blaspheming Saying in itself, and came from a wrong Disposition of Mind, and reflected on a Work of the Holy Ghost done in their own Presence; yet being only a sudden Flight, St. *Peter* did not impute it as Blasphemy to them, but merely as Rashness of Judgment; and therefore applied himself to convince them of their Mistake, with so good Effect, that 3000 were converted that very Day. On the Whole therefore, the only Persons, whom we have Ground to think guilty of *the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, meant in the Text, are they, who from bad Motives, and, as we say, in cold Blood, revile and rail against such Operations of the divine Spirit, as are performed in their own Presence. Let us now inquire,

II. What is the true Sense of our Saviour's Declaration, that this one Sin *shall not*

* Acts ii. 13.

be forgiven, neither in this present World, nor that to come.

Some have apprehended him to mean only, that all passionate and injurious Language on common Occasions shall be considered as mere human Infirmity, that doth not put Men out of a State of Salvation; whereas the like Language concerning the Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost doth: brings them into a Condition of spiritual Death here, which, unless they rise again from it by a particular Repentance, will be followed by eternal Death hereafter. But surely it is taking much too great Liberty; first, by *all Manner of Sin and Blasphemy* to understand only all sinful Evil-speaking about common Matters, though our Saviour hath specified speaking against himself: then to say, that all Evil-speaking about common Matters is consistent with Salvation; and lastly, when the Text affirms peremptorily, that *the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, and that alone, *shall not be forgiven*; to add, unless Men particularly repent of it: a Limitation, for which there is not the least Authority, and which would bring down this Sin to just the same Level with many more. Some again think the Words of our blessed Lord, though

though expressed absolutely, are meant only in Comparison; that all other Sins will be forgiven sooner; and this with the most Difficulty of any. But, though doubtless there are some Instances, especially in the Old Testament, where what is said positively, must be understood comparatively: yet, I think none will be found of that Sort, where the Assertion is made with such great and calm Solemnity, and so circumstantially. Lastly, not a few, observing that in all Writers, the most general Denunciations often admit no small Number of particular Exceptions, conceive, that this before us may[y]. But then some Foundation must always appear for such Exceptions, either in other Passages of the same or other Writers, concerning the same Matter, or in the Nature of the Thing: and no such Foundation hath yet been shewn in the present Case. Besides, the Declaration, that *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven*, is itself an Exception from a general Rule, that *all Manner of Sin shall be forgiven*: and to suppose other Exceptions again from this Excep-

[y] *Erasmus* in his Paraphrase interprets it, *vix inveniet veniam.* And *Latimer* in *Strype*'s Memorials, vol. ii. p. 70. saith, This Sin is called unforgiveable, because seldom forgiven: but on Repentance it may.

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tion, seems very unnatural. It would indeed be presumptuous to restrain the Mercies of God: but it is equally and perhaps more dangerous to extend them farther, than he permits us.

The Addition, that this Sin *shall neither be forgiven in this World, nor the World to come*, is taken by many for no more, than a stronger and fuller Way of saying, that it *shall not*, or shall *never, be forgiven*: which are the Expressions used in St. *Mark* and St. *Luke*. Some understand by it, neither in the Age or Dispensation of the Law, which was then present, when our Saviour spoke; nor of the Gospel, which was ready to take Place of it: for so the Phrases, *this World*, and *the World to come*, are used in some Passages of the New Testament. But others, with good Appearance of Truth, carry the Meaning further, and apprehend it to be; that, whereas Corrections, and severe ones, are inflicted on many Sins in this Life, which yet, through the Grace and Mercy of God, are not imputed, to Mens Condemnation, at the last Day; for this Sin, on the contrary, both heavy Punishment should fall on the guilty here, and heavier yet hereafter. And accordingly, in Fact, these blasphemous

Jews

Jews underwent, in a few Years, the most dreadful Judgements: nor have we Cause to think of their eternal State otherwise, than with great Horror. Such then being the Sense of our Saviour's Words, let us enquire,

III. Why he passed a Sentence, thus peculiarly severe, against this one only Sin.

Now, had the Offence been speaking irreverently concerning the Person of the Holy Ghost: it would not have been easy to assign any Reason, why that should be less pardonable, than the same Irreverence towards the Father, or the Son. But since, as you have seen, it was vilifying his miraculous Operations and Gifts: there appear in it the most evident Marks of such Guilt and Danger, as could belong to no other. It was the greatest and wilfullest Obstinacy in the wrong, that can be imagined; when they, and all around them, saw the most illustrious and beneficial Miracles, done in Confirmation of the most holy and benevolent Doctrine, to stand out in Opposition to both: to insist, that the Devil conspired against himself, rather than own the Finger of God, where it was so exceedingly visible: and not only to blaspheme the Son of Man thus, during his State of Humiliation, at which

which indeed their Prejudices might naturally take some considerable Offence; but after he was *exalted by the right Hand of God* [z], and had *baptized* his Apostles *with the Holy Ghost and with Fire*, as *John* had foretold he should [a]; and enabled them by that Means, both to do *greater Works than himself* [b], and besides to *understand all Mysteries* [c], to *discern* and *make manifest the Secrets of Hearts* [d], to *speak with unknown Tongues* [e], to *shew* beforehand *Things to come* [f], to confer the same Gifts on whom they would; and when every Assembly of Christians afforded almost daily Proofs of these Things; to persist yet, neither *entering into the Kingdom of Heaven themselves, nor suffering others to enter in* [g]; and not only to oppose, but to revile, the strongest Evidence, laid before them in the fullest Manner; and that, very probably, against the secret Conviction of their own Hearts too: such Behaviour manifests the most hardened and desperate Wickedness. All Men must suppose it, and our Saviour knew it, to proceed from an incurable Disease within; prevailing over the powerfullest and last Remedy, which divine

[z] Acts ii. 33. [a] Matth. iii. 11. [b] John xiv. 12. [c] 1 Cor. xiii. 2. [d] 1 Cor. xii. 10, xiv. 25. [e] 1 Cor. xiv. 2, &c. [f] John xvi. 13. [g] Matth. xxiii. 13.

Wisdom

Wiſdom thought fit to uſe: and therefore his Declaration, however awful, was but the natural Conſequence of the State they were in. Had they only doubted, had they only denied, there might have been ſome Hope of them: but when Men are come to railing and blaſpheming, as they were, they have done with attending and conſidering. Yet ſtill, had they only rejected the Teſtimony of others concerning the wonderful Operations and Gifts of the Spirit; ſtronger Teſtimony of others, or that of their own Senſes, might have been added: but when this laſt had been vouchſafed them, there could poſſibly be no higher. It might indeed appear to them, on maturer Reflection, more convincing, than at firſt: but after ſufficient Leiſure to reflect had been alſo allowed them, as I have ſhewn you it was; every Thing, that could be done for them, conſiſtently with leaving them Freedom of Will, had been done, and all in vain.

This, you ſee, is plainly a very different Caſe from that of any other Sin. And the peculiar Guilt and Danger of it conſiſts, not in its being committed againſt the Holy Spirit; but in its being a wilful and obſtinate Rejection, from wicked Motives, of the only Means remaining for Reformation and Forgiveneſs. Suppoſe the

Provi-

Providence of God had so ordered it, that all Diseases should be curable, by some one particular Course of Medicine; still whoever despised and ridiculed that Course, instead of taking it, must perish.' And in like Manner, though all Sins would else be pardonable through the Grace of the Gospel: whoever scorns the utmost Efforts of that Grace, must fail of it. And our Saviour foreseeing, that these Persons would, pronounces their Doom. Every Advantage, that any others ever were to enjoy, they had enjoyed to the full, without Effect: and it was not suitable to the Honour of God's Government, or the Holiness of his Nature, to strive with such by still more extraordinary Methods; and do for the worst of Men, what he had not done for the rest. Their Condition, therefore, was not, that they should be denied Pardon, though they did repent: but it was foreknown, that they would not repent. So that whoever doth, may be sure, for that very Reason, that he hath not been guilty of the unpardonable *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*. Indeed no one now, when, through Length of Time, the Circumstances of the Case are so much altered, can lie under the same Guilt with those, to whom our Saviour spoke: nor can he therefore lie

under the ſame Condemnation: for *the Judgment of God is* always *according to Truth*[h]. But though we cannot equal the Wickedneſs of the *Jews* in this Reſpect, yet we may come dreadfully near it. And therefore I proceed now to ſhew you,

IV. What Sins do, or do not, approach towards that, which is mentioned in the Text.

And here I ſhall ſpeak ſeparately, firſt of the Caſe of Unbelievers in Chriſt, then of Believers in him.

Unbelievers, ignorant of the Goſpel, or of its proper Evidence, and who could not help their Ignorance, are not blameable for their Unbelief: nor ſurely inexcuſeable, though they ſhould add reproachful Words to it, *ſpeaking evil of Things which they know not*[i]. And though it be a great Unhappineſs to them, that they have neither the ſame Means of Reformation and ſpiritual Improvement, nor the ſame Aſſurance of Pardon and Acceptance, that Chriſtians have: yet it is their Unhappineſs only, not their Fault. But ſuch Unbelievers, as through a contemptuous Negligence refuſe to conſider the Doctrine of Chriſt, or from a vain Opinion of the Sufficiency of their own Reaſon, or from Love to

[h] Rom. ii. 2. [i] Jude 10.

any

any Sin, reject it; these put themselves in the high Road towards the Sin, condemned here by our Saviour. And if they add to their Infidelity profane and irreverent Language; they advance nearer to it. But if Part of that Language be ascribing the Miracles and spiritual Gifts, mentioned in the New Testament, to an evil Power, of which some amongst them have given Intimations; and above all, if they do this from a malicious Heart, and perhaps against their own inward Persuasion too; then they come as near to it, as they are able. And yet one cannot but hope, that, since the Evidence of the Gospel is not either quite so full and strong, or so obvious and easily seen at once, as it was in the Days of our Saviour and his Apostles; they may, after all, think better of it, repent and obtain Pardon.

If indeed they have, since they came to a full Use of Reason, deliberately professed Christianity, and then forsaken it, and become Railers and Scoffers at it; this Case is worse, than if they had never believed; in Proportion as they have seen the Evidences, understood the Nature, and felt the Influences of the Gospel; and yet, after all, have broken the Faith, which they had solemnly engaged to it. The

Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* therefore declares *it is impoſſible for thoſe, who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they ſhall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance: ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open Shame*[k]. But then, explicit and terrible as theſe Words are, yet ſome of them plainly relate to thoſe miraculous Gifts and Powers, which we do not now experience, and therefore cannot ſin againſt them to that Degree, nor by Conſequence make our Condition ſo deſperate, as thoſe who did; beſides that *impoſſible*, both in Scripture and common Language, often means no more, than extremely difficult and hopeleſs; but not beyond the Reach of his Grace, *with whom all Things are poſſible*[l]. And as this Impoſſibility is expreſſly here ſaid to be that of *renewing them to Repentance*: (which powerfully ſtrengthens what I have already proved to you, that the *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is unpardonable, only becauſe it leaves no Foundation to

[k] Heb. vi. 4—6.

[l] Matth. xix. 26.

repent

repent upon) ſo when any one *is renewed to Repentance*, this Paſſage contains not the leaſt Intimation, that he cannot be forgiven.

But ſuppoſing a total and ſettled Unbelief and Apoſtacy to be ever ſo irretrievable; yet merely having doubted, nay having inclined to the wrong Side, or even been a good deal perſuaded of it, and that for ſome Time, is very far from being the ſame Caſe. The Apoſtles themſelves at firſt did not believe the Reſurrection of our Saviour: St. *Thomas* ſtood out a whole Week: two of them in St. *Luke* ſpeak of their Perſuaſion, that this was *he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*, as paſt and at an End[a]. Yet, as all this aroſe from Infirmity, not Wickedneſs, they met with an eaſy Pardon; and ſo will others like them. But few of thoſe, whom Senſuality, and fewer ſtill, whom vain Self-opinion leads to Scepticiſm, ever recover themſelves. And as this affords no ſmall Confirmation to the awful Doctrine of the Text: ſo it ſhould warn all from taking ſo much as the firſt Steps in that fatal Path, from which Men ſo ſeldom return: but eſpecially againſt ſetting out with treating Religion and Morals in a ſcornful and ludicrous Manner; which is directly oppoſite to modeſt

[a] Luke xxiv. 21.

and humble Inquiry; manifests a very criminal Partiality, as well as Sufficiency; and naturally terminates in a complete Disregard to every Thing wise and good.

Thus much concerning Infidels and Apostates. Christians, while they continue such, are in very little Danger of committing the Sin, condemned in the Text. Some indeed have imagined, that every deliberate Transgression amounted to it, and was unpardonable; because the Epistle to the *Hebrews* saith, that *if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment*[a]. But then it appears very plainly, that not any wilful Sin whatever is meant there, but that one only, which is mentioned immediately before and after; laying aside *the Profession of the Faith, treading under Foot the Son of God, counting the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing, doing Despite unto the Spirit of Grace:* that is, renouncing and reviling Christianity. And it by no Means follows, that because they, who have rejected *Christ*, will no where find any other Atonement for their Sins, therefore they who believe in him, but have criminally

[a] Heb. x. 26, 27.

violated

violated ſome of his Precepts, cannot partake of his Atonement, though they apply for it with penitent Hearts. It is very true, St. *John* hath told us, *there is a Sin unto Death*, at leaſt was in thoſe Days, of which if any one was guilty, he could give no Encouragement to *pray for him* *. But the whole Scripture tells us, that not every wilful Sin is certainly unto Death: and our Saviour in the Text hath told us, that only the *Blaſphemy*, the malicious Evil-ſpeaking, *againſt the Holy Ghoſt* is ſuch. Now they who believe in the Father and the Son cannot ſurely think ill either of the Perſon or the Operations of the Spirit; and therefore cannot be ordinarily tempted to ſpeak ill of them, with any real Meaning of what they ſay: and unmeaning profane Expreſſions, though undoubtedly very full of Guilt, and likely to produce more and greater Guilt, are yet far from that moſt abandoned Wickedneſs, to which the Paſſage before us relates.

Sometimes indeed Chriſtians, and very good ones, may accuſe themſelves of having entertained irrreverent Thoughts, and, it may be, ſpoken irreverent Words of Religion, of the Scriptures, of the Holy Spirit himſelf: but this

* 1 John v. 16.

hath been, when they were under ſo peculiar a Diſturbance of Mind, that they had not the Command of their Thoughts or Words: and then they may be abſolutely ſure, that the all-knowing, juſt, and good God will not conſider theſe Offences, as, in a moral Senſe, theirs. In ſome Diſorders, it is no more poſſible for Men to hinder wicked Thoughts from taking Poſſeſſion of their Minds, or blaſphemous Words from coming out of their Mouths, than to hinder any other Diſtemper, (for plainly this is one) which may attack any other Part of them, from ſhewing itſelf by its common Effects. And it is no more a Crime, when they are in ſuch a Condition, to utter Things even againſt God; than it is for a Child, in Convulſions or light-headed, to ſtrike it's Parent. And though they may not think themſelves diſordered, and in other Reſpects may not be ſo; yet in this Want of Self-government, proportionably to the Degree of it, they certainly are. And it makes no Difference at all with Regard to their Innocence, whether the Diſorder be a natural bodily one, affecting the Mind; which is notoriouſly the common Caſe, though attended ſometimes with very unaccountable Symptoms; or whether it ariſe from the Suggeſtions of the wicked one. For

as he tempted Christ himſelf, ſo he hath ever ſince moleſted Chriſtians; and often ſuggeſted the worſt of Things to the beſt of Men. Our Words indeed, notwithſtanding ſuch Temptations, we may for the moſt Part reſtrain: but we can by no Means always prevent Impreſſions being made on our Imaginations: and how ſtrongly ſoever any one may experience them to be made on his, ſtill the wicked Thoughts, which he laments all the while, is terrified at, and almoſt in Agonies about, certainly do not proceed from his own Will and Choice; and for that Reaſon, far from being unpardonable Sins, they are in Truth no Sins at all; but grievous Afflictions, for which God will hereafter reward him, if he endeavours to ſuffer them patiently. This you would immediately perceive, and ſay, in the Caſe of any other Perſon: and therefore, when Occaſion requires, you ſhould ſay it to yourſelf. But if you cannot, or if it proves to no great Purpoſe, nay to ſo little that you are driven to the very Borders of Deſpair, yet Deſpair itſelf, ſo far as it is a mere Diſeaſe, is not an Offence againſt God.

But then, how remote ſoever we are from committing the Sin, which cannot be pardoned; we may too eaſily commit ſuch, as

will not be pardoned: for none will, without true Repentance. And every Transgression either invites or drives us into repeated and worse Transgressions, which insensibly so *harden us through their Deceitfulness*[p], that though, while the *Day of Salvation*[q] continues, we always may repent, it becomes less and less likely, that we ever shall. And even if we do, we shall, notwithstanding, even in this World, usually be great Sufferers one Way or another: and, unless we become uncommonly zealous in our Duty, shall attain a much lower Degree of Happiness in the next. Bear in your Minds therefore the Son of *Sirach*'s Words: *Flee from Sin, as from the Face of a Serpent: for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee: the Teeth thereof are as the Teeth of a Lion, slaying the Souls of Men. All Iniquity is as a two-edged Sword, the Wounds whereof cannot be healed*[r]: cannot be healed at all, without Danger and Difficulty and Pain; nor so perfectly at best, but that still either Weakness, or Scars and Deformities however, will be left behind. Let us therefore carefully avoid all Sin: but particularly avoid all Sins relating

[p] Heb. iii. 13. [q] 2 Cor. vi. 2. [r] Ecclus. xxi. 2, 3.

to

the Holy Ghoſt, and practiſe all Duties relating to him: that ſo, abiding in his Fellowſhip, being ſupported by his Teſtimony, and rejoicing in his Comfort, we may at length be *ſealed with the Spirit of Promiſe, the Earneſt of that Inheritance*[a], to which, &c.

[a] Eph. i. 13, 14.

SERMON X.

MATTH. xii. 36.

But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word, that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment.

OUR bleſſed Saviour, whenever his Hearers were Perſons of well-diſpoſed Minds, and free from Prejudices, taught them the Duties of Religion in the plaineſt Terms. But Length of Time, and Difference of Language, have made ſome of his Expreſſions, even on ſuch Occaſions, hard to be underſtood, or liable to be miſunderſtood: and hence, unleſs we are both upright and conſiderate, may ariſe Miſtakes of great Importance. For if we interpret theſe Paſſages with too much Indulgence to ourſelves, as human Nature is very prone to do, we corrupt the Purity of his Precepts, and endanger

our own Salvation: firſt aiming at leſs than we ought, then of Courſe falling ſhort of that. And yet the oppoſite Extreme, of ſtraining them too high, hath ſeldom done Good, and often Harm: hath deterred weak Spirits from taking the Burthen of Religion upon them, entangled ſcrupulous Tempers with endleſs Perplexities, and made rigid ones uncharitable and ſuperſtitious: given the Enemies of Chriſtianity Opportunities of declaiming againſt it, as unnaturally ſevere; and tempted the careleſs Profeſſors of it, after rejecting, as they well might, the over-ſtrict Senſe of ſuch Phraſes, not to take the Pains of looking for any other; but go on, unreſtrained by them, to live as they pleaſe.

Thus it hath happened in Relation to the Text of Scripture, which I have juſt read to you. Some few, underſtanding by *every idle Word*, every needleſs or trifling one; and by *giving Account*, being condemned; have either forced themſelves to an abſurd Reſervedneſs and Silence in Company, or been very uneaſy, that they were unable to do it; while the profane have ridiculed both them and the Goſpel, on that Account. But the Generality of Mankind, ſoon perceiving, that this could not be

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the Meaning of the Words, have never concerned themſelves to inquire what was; but have freely taken all the ſame Liberties in Diſcourſe, as if no ſuch Warning had ever been given by our bleſſed Lord.

Now that he was far from the Intention of laying down unſociable Rules for Behaviour, his whole Character ſufficiently ſhews; which was in no Reſpect harſh and auſtere, but humane and converſible. The whole Temper of his Religion proves it yet more fully: it is an *eaſy Yoke*[a]; it enjoins *whatſoever Things are lovely and of good Report*[b]; it enjoins particularly, *being courteous*[c]; of which being affable is a material Part: and this can never conſiſt with diſapproving, as unlawful, every Word that might have been ſpared. Diſcourſe on Subjects of little or no Importance is as neceſſary, at Times, for the Relaxation of our Minds, as Exerciſe without Buſineſs for the Refreſhment of our Bodies. It is a proper Exertion of that Chearfulneſs, which God hath plainly deſigned us to ſhew, on ſmall Occaſions, as well as great. Beſides, it wins and engages thoſe, whom ſpeechleſs or ſententious Gravity might not only diſpleaſe, but prepoſſeſs againſt every Thing good: whereas

[a] Matth. xi. 30. [b] Phil. iv. 8. [c] 1 Pet. iii. 8.

obſerving,

obſerving, even in ſlight Matters, the Apoſtle's Rule, of *graceful Speech,* (for ſo the beſt Interpreters underſtand what is tranſlated *Speech with Grace) ſeaſoned with Salt, that we may know how we ought to anſwer every Man*[d], both expreſſes and increaſes mutual Good-will; and enables us, from being innocently entertaining, to become ſeriouſly uſeful. We may be ſure therefore, that whatever Diſcourſe hath this general good Tendency, and no bad one, be there otherwiſe ever ſo little Uſe or Significancy in it, cannot be in any blameable Senſe, *idle Words.*

And indeed, if we look into what precedes the Text, we ſhall find it was not occaſioned by Perſons ſaying more than they needed, but other Things than they ought. And therefore learned Men have ſuppoſed this Phraſe, of *idle Words,* to be one of thoſe many, in all Writers, which imply more than they expreſs. In Scripture, *unfruitful Works of Darkneſs*[e] means pernicious Works: what *is unprofitable for you*[f], means, what would be hurtful to you. In common Speech, a worthleſs Man, is one, who, beſides having no Good, hath much Harm in him. And thus they underſtand an *idle Word* to be not merely an uſeleſs, but a falſe

[d] Col. iv. 6. [e] Eph. v. 11. [f] Heb. xiii. 17.

Aſſertion,

Aſſertion, which is almoſt always, at the ſame Time, in one Way or other, an injurious one: ſuch as evidently thoſe were, of which our Saviour is here ſpeaking. An Interpretation, that undoubtedly removes all Appearance of Harſhneſs from this Part of his Doctrine, and is not without Support from the Uſe of the Term in old Writers. Yet ſtill, the ſolemn Form of Introduction, *But I ſay unto you*, ſeldom, if ever, uſed by him, when he taught only common and known Truths, inclines one ſtrongly to look for ſomewhat farther, than a bare Declaration, that injurious and calumniating Language is ſinful. And, in Fact, the Expreſſion, *idle Words*, in the *Jewiſh* Language, ſometimes denotes all ſuch, as make up the careleſs eaſy Converſation of our Leiſure-Time: agreeably to which, the Writers in it mention them, often with Contempt, or lower Marks of Diſlike, as there is too often Cauſe: but now and then alſo with a Degree of Praiſe: as when a noted Commentator of theirs, who lived above 500 Years ago[§], explains that Paſſage in the firſt Pſalm, *His Leaf alſo ſhall not wither*, from Rabbins yet older than himſelf, thus: that

§ R. David Kimchi.



even the idle Talk, ſo he expreſſes it, *of a good Man ought to be regarded:* the moſt ſuperfluous Things he ſaith, are always of ſome Value. And other ancient Authors have the ſame Phraſe nearly in the ſame Senſe.

Our Saviour therefore probably intended here to ſay, that *we ſhall give an Account, in the Day of Judgment*, of our moſt unguarded and unmeaning Diſcourſe. Not that we ſhall be charged with the Whole of it, as criminal. God forbid! We may as well be charged with every needleſs inarticulate Sound, or bodily Geſture[h]. The Apoſtle ſpeaks of Perſons *giving* their *Account with Joy*[i]. And ſo may we give ours, even concerning this Part of our Converſation, if we take Care to be ſuch as we ought. For *make the Tree good:* and both *the Fruit*[k] and the Leaves will be ſo too. The full Senſe of the Text then is, that not only our ſtudied and deliberate, but our ſlighter and more negligent Words, as well as Actions, will, in Proportion to their Weight, have an Influence on the future Determination of our everlaſting State. It appears, from what goes before,

[h] And indeed the Stoic Doctrine was: *Digitum exere, peccas.* Perſ. Sat. V. v. 119.

[i] Heb. xiii. 17.

[k] Matth. xii. 33.

before, that ſome of the *Jews* had been mali-ciouſly aſcribing the Miracles of Chriſt to in-fernal Powers. Others, without Queſtion, as it always happens, had thoughtleſsly taken up and ſpread the Notion, which they had heard. He therefore, after confuting the former, lets the latter alſo know their Share of the Guilt, by adding, that, on every Occaſion, *out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth ſpeaketh. A good Man, out of the good Treaſure of the Heart, bringeth forth good Things: and an evil Man, out of the evil Treaſure, bringeth forth evil Things.* Then he goes on: *But I ſay unto you, that every idle Word, that Men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgement. For by thy Words thou ſhalt be juſtified, and by thy Words thou ſhalt be condemned*[1].

Deſigned Expreſſions, in Diſcourſe, of Im-piety towards God, Injuſtice to Man, Diſre-gard to Virtue or Decency, can proceed only from an abandoned Heart. But the Conver-ſation of moſt Perſons is full of unobſerved Faults and bad Tendencies: which, like a Multitude of ſmall Expences, make us Debt-ors beyond what we could imagine: and by

[1] Matth. xii. 34—37.

continual, though ſlighter Impreſſions on our Morals and Piety, gradually undermine what the moſt violent open Aſſault could not have overturned. Each particular Offence appears a Trifle: ſome, taken alone, almoſt imperceptible: they diſguiſe themſelves under the Shew of that chearful Freedom, without which human Life would be quite uncomfortable: and thus a Number of Enemies, entering ſingle, form a Body at Length, that maſters the Place. Now though it may ſeem no great Overſight to admit one or two of theſe; yet not to be alarmed as they increaſe upon us, is unpardonable Want of Care. Therefore, to acquaint ourſelves better with the Danger, and the Means of guarding againſt it, let us conſider, how common it is to ſpeak in a very unfit Manner, chiefly through Inconſiderateneſs, of Religion, moral Virtue, and one another.

I. Of Religion. Both Prudence and good Breeding, not to ſay, a little Diſtruſt of their own Abilities and Impartiality, might induce even thoſe, who have examined its Authority and doubt of its Truth, if any ſuch there be, ſtill to be ſhy of declaring againſt what many others, and poſſibly ſome of equal Abilities,

after

after as full an Examination, hold ſacred. And yet ſuch as have never examined in the leaſt, nor once put a Queſtion to themſelves about it, can, with a moſt contemptuous Negligence, take for granted the Falſehood of the moſt awful Truths, and talk upon that Suppoſition, in ſo aſſured and eaſy a Manner, as if Nobody differed from them. Whenever they do chance to hear of an Argument, that ſeems to make for them, they applaud it, even without underſtanding it. But a Jeſt they look on, as ſuperior to all Argument: and if any Text of Scripture can have an unfair ludicrous Turn given it, or any Article of Faith be miſrepreſented into an Abſurdity, this they triumph in, without Mercy. Now whatever Excuſe there may be for the Doubts, or the Miſtakes, of inquiſitive and humble Minds: yet when the ignorant or thoughtleſs take upon them to deſpiſe the Laws of Heaven, without Pretence for it; and make the nobleſt Hopes of human Nature, the Theme of their Scorn and Ridicule: this is a moſt heinous Kind of idle Diſcourſe.

But there is another Sort, though not ſo ſhocking, yet more extenſively miſchievous: when they, who profeſs Religion, and think

they are ſerious in the Profeſſion, as ſurely, if it be a Truth, it is the moſt ſerious one that can be, allow themſelves inadvertently in ſaying what tends to its Ruin: when they ſpeak with Diſregard of the appointed Methods of ſupporting it in the World: when they join in looſe Harangues againſt Enthuſiaſm and Superſtition, without putting in due Cautions to diſtinguiſh them from the moſt rational Feelings of Love, and Marks of Reſpect, to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, which Chriſtianity hath enjoined: when they, who by no Means intend to be profane, repeat the profane Things that others have ſaid or done, with Indulgence and Pleaſure: when they carry on Diſcourſe, that reflects upon Doctrines, which they themſelves inwardly believe; and treat Duties with Indifference, or even Contempt, which at the ſame Time they acknowledge, and, it may be, practiſe, as Duties. This unmeaning Compliance with faſhionable Talk, which they might eaſily avoid, yet not be remarkable; or if they were, it would be to their Honour; brings them by Degrees to think ſlightly of what they have been affecting to ſpeak ſlightly of: till their Piety waſtes away into an empty Form: and

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it is ſeldom long, before they grow aſhamed of even that. Thus is their *Mouth their Deſtruction, and their Lips the Snare of their Souls*[m]. At leaſt they lead others into a wrong Way, who are afterwards tempted to go farther; they permit themſelves to be ſuſpected; they deſert the Defence of Religion, when it wants all poſſible Help; and are falſe to their own Cauſe. All good Men therefore ſhould be very careful, that their outward Appearance do not contradict their inward Faith. Doubtleſs there are Seaſons, in which Pleaſantry is proper: but there are Subjects, on which it is never proper; and Religion is one. Abruptly intruding grave Maxims into the Midſt of Mirth, without any Thing to call for them, would be diſguſtful and abſurd. But ſtill, whatever Difference of Manner different Occaſions may require, as they certainly require a very great one; we ſhould always continue the ſame in our gayeſt Hours, that we are in our moſt ſerious; and preſerve an Uniformity of Character throughout. Nor can there be any Character more conſiſtent or amiable, than theirs, whom dutiful Regard to the greateſt and beſt of Beings influences, not only to be juſt and good in their Behaviour, but ſome-

[m] Prov. xviii. 7.

times inſtructive, ſometimes entertaining, always innocent, in their Converſation.

This Head of irreligious idle Words could not have been concluded, without ſevere Animadverſions on the monſtrous Cuſtom of unmeaning Oaths and Imprecations, if the Sinfulneſs of it were not ſo notorious, and ſo often ſet before you, that I hope you can have no Doubt, but ſuch Language will be a dreadful Article of Account in the Day of Judgement. Let us therefore proceed to conſider,

II. What Sort of Uſage moral Virtue frequently meets with, in our familiar Diſcourſe; not from any premeditated Deſign againſt it; for that belongs to another Subject; but principally through Inadvertency. How favourably are moſt of us apt to ſpeak even of groſs Vices, when high Rank, or ſuperficial Agreeableneſs, give them a falſe Luſtre: and how commonly do we treat the baſeſt and moſt cruel Behaviour, that Men are guilty of in Purſuit of their Pleaſure, as Matter of Diverſion only; as no Exceptions againſt their Characters, but rather perhaps a Kind of Recommendation! How imperfectly ſometimes is the Decency of Converſation preſerved amongſt Perſons of tolerably good Repute: in direct Contradiction to the Apoſtle's Precept, *Let*

no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth[n]: and with what ſtrange Indulgence are Offences of this Kind uſually received! How thoughtleſsly do many applaud and propagate vile Notions of human Nature, that tend only to make it yet viler; and gratify a prepoſterous Vanity, by repreſenting their Species worſe, than it is. Concerning themſelves indeed, the Patrons of ſuch Opinions may, in a good Meaſure, deſerve Belief. Yet even they are not quite ſo bad, as they abſurdly endeavour to have it imagined, all Mankind are! How many again will defend Immoralities, of which they would by no Means be guilty: and are profligate in their Diſcourſe, while they are regular in their Lives! Nor doth it content us always, by our idle Talk to keep Wickedneſs in Countenance: but we lay Virtue under poſitive Diſcouragements. Modeſty and Chaſtity, in one Sex at leaſt, with too many is a Matter of great Raillery. Of Uprightneſs and Honeſty, on ſome Occaſions, we ſpeak with but a contemptuous Kind of Approbation at beſt. Patience and Forgiveneſs of Injuries we treat as downright Meanſpiritedneſs; Diſcretion in Conduct, as a formal diſagreeable Thing; Frugality as an

[n] Eph. iv. 29.

odious one, though requisite for the Purposes of Justice, or made subservient to those of Charity. But especially where disadvantageous Peculiarities throw any Thing of a Shade on the truest Merit; we are extremely apt to condemn and ridicule in the Gross, what, however clouded, we ought to distinguish, and mention with due Honour. A little Ungracefulness of Behaviour, or Meanness of Appearance, or Defect in Point of Abilities, or Ignorance of the World, though accompanied with a worthy Heart, shall provoke a harder Censure from us, than a mischievous Turn of Mind, or a vicious Course of Behaviour: nay we can fancy Circumstances, when we find none, to render good Qualities despicable. Then while we thus depreciate real Virtues, we exalt imaginary ones into their Places: false Honour, false Good-nature; which lead often to the worst of Crimes, and disguise them under the best of Names. In short, the Conversation, even of those who are counted virtuous, by others and themselves, goes a great deal too much, without their attending to it, on Maxims directly contrary to the Principles which they avow: and places both the Conduct and Enjoyment of Life upon a wrong Footing. For Instance: Are we not perpe-

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tually ſpeaking of this preſent World, as if it were our All: nay, of the outward Shew of Things here, as if it were the true and only Happineſs of Man? What Impreſſion muſt this make, by Degrees, on the Minds of thoſe who hear us: indeed on our own? By thoughtleſsly talking thus upon miſtaken Suppoſitions, we ſhall come at Length to forget they are ſuch; and act at leaſt like thoſe, who think them true. But let us now conſider,

III. How wrongly we treat each other, in our careleſs eaſy Diſcourſe; not from deliberate ill Will, but by Way of Amuſement.

One raiſes an idle Story, to divert the Company, at the Expence of a Perſon, who, it may be, hath not given the leaſt Ground for it. A ſecond catches what he hears; perhaps believes it too haſtily; perhaps doth not believe it, but tells it notwithſtanding: a third fills it up with plauſible Circumſtances: the general Voice repeats it: and then, what every one ſays, paſſes for certain: eſpecially if the Compoſition be ſeaſoned with a ſmall Spice of Wit, it is univerſally reliſhed, and laſts for a long Time. But if beſides, it leſſens an honourable Character; inſtead of doubting, or being ſorry, People echo it with immoderate Joy:

and

and yet every one thinks himſelf clear of all Blame, becauſe he means only Entertainment. Poſſibly he did: and yet, as neither he, nor they, that heard him, would have been near ſo much entertained with a good Report, as an ill one; there is almoſt always at the Bottom of this Practice, a latent Malignity of Heart againſt our Fellow-Creatures; *our Brethren, for whom Chriſt died*[o], and whom both Nature and Religion command us to love. But whatever the Principle be, the Effects are very bad. Unthinking Licentiouſneſs of Speech, concerning Perſons of high Rank, may endanger even a Nation's Peace. And yet what Numbers are there, that will venture to aſſert, without the leaſt Diffidence, whatever ſuits their Humour, on Matters, which perhaps they know Nothing of: and when once they are got into the Road of Talk, quicken their Pace, without perceiving it; and will go any Length, to keep one another Company: ſo that, to uſe the Terms of Scripture, *the Beginning of the Words of their Mouth is Fooliſhneſs: and the End, miſchievous Madneſs*[p]. But in private Life, no one can tell, what unhappy Conſequences a falſe Report to the Diſad-

[o] Rom. xiv. 15. [p] Eccl. x. 13.

vantage

vantage of another, though seemingly in a Trifle, may have. Or if it were a true Report; let us ask ourselves, how could our Tempers, how indeed would our Characters bear, that every Thing, which is true of us, should be spread abroad? And were the Person, who had done it, to say in his own Defence, that he had no Design of hurting us; when however he had no Regard, whether he hurt us or not; would this appear a sufficient Plea? The Harm done is not the less, often the greater, for the negligent Manner it is done in. That procures Belief: whereas apparent Malice, or Passion, would render what we say suspected. Besides, Anger is frequently founded on Provocations, that a little excuse the Injuries it doth: but indolently treading under Foot the Reputations of others, is wanton Cruelty; that with the gayest Indifference delivers Persons over to Reproach or Contempt, it may be for Life, rather than an ill-natured Story, or a lucky Turn of Words, shall be lost; that puts the good Name of another, on which his All may depend, into the Balance, and lets the Love of Talk, the Vanity of having early Intelligence, or any other silly Fancy, outweigh it. Every one should strive indeed

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to make such Conversation harmless, by expressing a Disregard and Dislike to it. But, as this will never be done effectually; so, if it were, the Guilt of these charitable Communicators would be much the same; for they certainly did not design to be thus insignificant.

There is yet another, and frequently a more fatal Way still, of injuring others by unmeaning Discourse: when, merely to enliven the present Hour, we give them, with false Civility, a higher Opinion of their own Accomplishments, or our Esteem of them, or good Intentions towards them, than we ought. Many ridiculous Mistakes, and many serious Inconveniences, are Men thus drawn into: they lose the little Knowledge they had of themselves; affect what misbecomes them, attempt what they are unequal to; and take wrong Steps in Life, that always expose, and often ruin them: to the great Diversion, sometimes, of those, who should be otherwise moved at seeing the Mischief to which they have contributed.

These Instances, without seeking for more, abundantly shew the Need of watching over our freest and easiest Conversation, and the Justice of its undergoing God's final Censure.

Lo, there is not a Word in my Tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether[q]. And whatever he observes whether good or bad in us, the righteous Judge of the whole Earth will accordingly reward or punish. Perhaps we may not particularly foresee the Harm we do by our irreligious, immoral, or injurious idle Words: but we cannot help foreseeing, that not a little may arise from them: and it must be, in general, a wrong Turn of Mind, that prompts us to them. For as *the Fruit declareth if the Tree have been dressed; so is the Utterance of a Conceit in the Heart of Man*[r]. It is very true, that the Government of the Tongue at all Times is a Matter of great Difficulty: and *if any one offend not in Word, the same is a perfect Man*[s], indeed. But still we might offend much less than we do, and approach much nearer to this Perfection, would we but often recollect, *that for these Things* also *God will bring us into Judgment*[t]: a Consideration, that should make us, like the Psalmist, *keep our Mouth, as it were with a Bridle*[u].

Possibly it may be objected, that such Attention as this would embarrass Conversation.

[q] Ps. cxxxix. 3. [r] Ecclus. xxvii. 6. [s] James iii. 2.
[t] Eccl. xi. 9. [u] Ps. xxxix. 2.

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with endless Restraints, which will make it quite disagreeable: and the Awe of Religion in our chearful Moments, damp the whole Pleasure of Society. Nor can it be denied, that observing Rules in their Discourse, would, to some Persons, for some Time, be a grievous Task. But so it is in every Thing that we undertake to learn, especially if we have learnt wrong before: and yet we shall never learn to good Purpose, without observing Rules: and the closer Pains we take at first, the more graceful and easier Figure we shall make afterwards, in Performances of any Kind. Men of Understanding and Application may soon qualify themselves to be very entertaining on harmless and useful Subjects: and consequently running into others must imply, either low Abilities, or bad Dispositions, or criminal Thoughtlessness. But if Conversation doth lose, by due Regulations, a little of its Poignancy; it loses its Venom too: and surely the Delight of hearing, or saying, improper lively Things, may well be given up, to avoid the exquisite Uneasiness they sometimes cause, and the various ill Effects they generally have. As for the Awe of Religion: were it in our Choice, whether there should be an Inspector of our Actions and Words and Thoughts,

Thoughts, or not; it might deserve Consideration, what Influence on the Comfort of our Beings that Inspection would have. But since we know there is one, under whose Eye we live continually; our only Concern is to suit our Behaviour to this our Condition, be it more pleasing, or be it less. Not that in Reality there could be a happier, than Subjection to his fatherly Care, who considers our Frame, and *knoweth whereof we are made* [w]: who hath given us every Principle of Joy and Delight, that belongs to our Nature; and approves of the innocent Use of them all. But then the most indulgent Superior, that will preserve himself a Superior, as God assuredly will, must require so much Regard to his Presence, as shall restrain us, not only from wilful and flagrant Offences, but from that supine Negligence, which, though it be shewn in lesser Instances only, yet, by the incessant Repetition of them, argues great Disregard: such, that, were we to consider ourselves only as God's Creatures, we should be obliged to avoid conscientiously. But if we consider ourselves as fallen, sinful, redeemed Creatures, redeemed by the Love of him, whom *if we love we must keep his Commandments* [x], and

[w] Ps. ciii. 14. [x] John xiv. 15.

whose Wrath we shall not *escape, if we neglect so great Salvation*[y], here will be additional Motives of the strongest Sort, not only to *set a Watch before our Mouths, and keep the Door of our Lips*[z], but to *purify our Hearts*[a], through Faith in him: and when we have thus, for there is no other Way, *healed the Fountain, then it will send forth sweet Water*[b]: then, if the Sense of our Obligations, and our Danger, in this Respect, should, as it will, by representing Conversation in a different Light, from what we had seen it in before, moderate our Fondness for it; lessen the Time we spend in it, and the Share we take to ourselves of it; make us cautious of saying more than hath at least a general good Tendency, and careful to a greater Degree, in Proportion as we are obliged to live more in Company, and as our Discourse will be more regarded there: we shall plainly perceive, that no Manner of Harm follows, but more Good than a little, by the Leisure we thus gain for serious Thought, valuable Books, and requisite Employments of several Kinds. A more thorough Acquaintance, in Retirement, with our-

[y] Heb. ii. 3. [z] Psal. cxli. 3. [a] Acts xv. 9.
[b] 2 Kings ii. 21. James iii. 11.

selves

ſelves and our Duty, our own Affairs and uſeful Knowledge, will ſend us back into Company, from Time to Time, greatly improved, both in proper Subjects of Diſcourſe, and proper Cautions for ſpeaking of them in ſuch a Manner, as to be at once agreeable, innocent, and inſtructive. Thus prepared by the cool Reflections of Solitude, we might enjoy the full Pleaſure of Society, without any Remorſe enſuing: and turn that Part of our Lives, in which too commonly our beſt Inclinations wither away, and many bad ones take deep Root, into a continual Exerciſe of benefiting our Fellow-Creatures, and advancing ourſelves in the Favour of our Maker. For, to any one thus diſpoſed, numberleſs Opportunities would occur, at ſuch Times, of *Communication, which is good to the Uſe of edifying and miniſtering Grace unto the Hearers*[c]: Opportunities of making Religion and Morals look chearful and amiable; of inſinuating ſeaſonable Advice; of ſoftening rugged Tempers; of confirming right Reſolutions, and putting wrong Behaviour out of Countenance. And in Proportion as the natural or acquired Abilities of Men are greater, or their Rank ſe-

[c] Eph. iv. 29.

cures to them more Regard, the more extensively serviceable they may be in this Way. But where all these Advantages meet together in an eminent Degree, it is inexpressible, what Blessings to Mankind they, who enjoy them, might be, would they but use them well. For then, not only the busier Part of their Time would be spent in promoting Piety and Virtue, Prudence and Happiness; but their most disengaged and freest Hours become Seasons of delightful Improvement to all about them: in which, imitating the kindly Influences of Heaven, *their Doctrine would drop as the Rain, their Speech distil as the Dew: as the small Rain upon the tender Herb, and as the Showers upon the Grass*[d]

[d] Deut. xxxii. 2.

SERMON XI.

MATTH. xiii. 16.

But blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears, for they hear.

OUR Saviour, in the Parable of the Sower, which occasioned these Words, compares the Reception of his Doctrine in the Hearts of Men to that of Seed in different Sorts of Ground. Some are like the Highway, beaten and hard, an open Thoroughfare to all Comers and Goers: there it lies loose on the Surface, and is immediately crushed under Foot, or *devoured by the Fowls of the Air*: the very first Suggestion of the Devil, the World, or the Flesh, destroys at once the Effect of all the Instruction in their Duty that is given them. Others resemble a light, but shallow Soil, with a Rock underneath: where the Seed quickly springs up, but is quickly also scorched and withered. They

are glad to believe, and forward to profess, what promises the Favour of God and future Happiness; but impenetrable to all Attempts of a thorough Change within: bad Inclination resists firmly at the Bottom, while external Performances make a specious Appearance to the Eye. Whenever the Time comes, that they are to suffer or lose any Thing for doing their Duty, this is much too difficult a Service for them; they have no Root sufficient to furnish them with Strength to bear it; they are burnt up, and shrivel away to Nothing. In a third Sort, the Seed of the Word takes deeper Hold, and makes very strong and promising Shoots: but Thorns and bad Weeds, the earlier Possessors of the Field, rise up and choak it. For these grow of themselves: but it requires Culture, and Watchfulness to root them out: instead of which, too many plant them in the Midst of the Corn, intangle themselves, without Need, in the Cares and Riches and Pleasures of this Life, which they heedlessly indulge, till every better Principle is weakened, overshadowed and smothered. But still there remains a fourth Sort, *who, in an honest and good Heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth Fruit*[a]; yet very un-

[a] Luke viii. 15.

equally, *ſome an hundred Fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty.*

The Perſons, to whom this Doctrine was delivered, gave immediate Proof of its Truth. The Generality, fond of the Shew of Religion, but dreading to undertake the Practice of it in earneſt, *hearing heard not, and ſeeing ſaw not*[b], to any uſeful Purpoſe, what in this Form of Speech of our Saviour laid before them: as indeed he declares he knew would be their Caſe, and therefore deſignedly uſed a Manner of Expreſſion, which they would not take the Trouble, ſmall as it was, to underſtand[c]. For ſuch neither deſerved plainer Inſtructions, nor would have made any other than a bad Uſe of them; which could only have increaſed their Guilt. Nay, his Diſciples themſelves apprehended his Meaning, though obvious enough, but imperfectly; and deſired to have it explained to them[d]. This however ſhewed a good Diſpoſition: and therefore he not only condeſcends to their Requeſt, but aſſures them it was a Happineſs unſpeakable to have any Degree of proper Attention to, and ſerious Senſe of, a Thing ſo infinitely important, as God's Word. *Bleſſed are your Eyes, for they ſee; and your Ears, for they hear.* A Truth,

[b] Matth. xiii. 14. [c] Ib. [d] Luke viii. 9.

which, though applicable more eminently, beyond Comparifon, to thofe who heard and faw the Word of Life himfelf, yet muft hold in Proportion of all, who are taught, by the Miniftry of his Servants, the Chriftian Doctrine. This Paffage then afferts in a ftrong Manner the Benefit of religious Inftruction: which many appear, unhappily for themfelves and others, to undervalue exceedingly.

Indeed we are all very apt to overlook and flight the Advantages, that we have long enjoyed without Interruption, even in our worldly Affairs. Health and Plenty, Safety and Liberty, excite in us very little Thankfulnefs: but the Things of another, and, we imagine, diftant Life, make a ftill fainter Impreffion. Hence great Numbers thoughtleffly difregard Religion: and fome avowedly difbelieve it. No Wonder, if many of thefe think teaching it needlefs, or even hurtful. But others alfo, who profefs to acknowledge the Duties, that we owe to our Creator, of a fober, and righteous, and godly Life; yet maintain, that in Goodnefs, nay Juftice, he is bound to make them, and in Fact hath made them all, fo evident by Nature to every Man, that we want no farther Information to know the Whole of them. But how do they prove

 this?

this? The Goodneſs of God is extended to his various Creatures in Degrees extremely different; and none is entitled to claim this Degree or that. The Juſtice of God permits him to give as low Capacities to Men as he pleaſes; and binds him only to require, in Proportion to what he gives. Why then may he not put us under a Neceſſity of learning from each other, in a great Meaſure, the Way to future Happineſs, as well as the Methods of procuring to ourſelves the Conveniences and Neceſſaries of common Life? Should we not be wretchedly furniſhed with theſe, indeed ſhould we be able to ſubſiſt, were each Generation, each Man, to provide them for his own Uſe, without being previouſly taught[e]? And muſt we not have been much more at a Loſs in Matters of a moral and ſpiritual Nature? We are endued with Reaſon: but we ſhould apply it very little, if at all, to Subjects of this Kind; and make a very ſlow Progreſs in them, if we did; unleſs Education, that is, Inſtruction, opened the Way, and directed our Steps. We have an inbred Senſe of Good and Evil, which enables

[e] Neque tam eſt acris acies in naturis hominum & ingeniis, ut res tantas quiſquam, niſi monſtratas, poſſit videre; neque tanta tamen in rebus obſcuritas, ut eas non penitus acri vir ingenio cernat, ſi modo aſpexerit. Cic. de Or. l. 3. § 31.

us, in many Things, *of ourſelves to judge what is right*[f]. But then, however it comes to paſs, which our boaſted Faculties will ſcarce be able to tell us, this moral Perception is by no Means perfect or diſtinct; and it is mixed with Paſſions and Appetites, far livelier and ſtronger, that frequently obſcure, and ſometimes pervert it. Still in Fact, the Duties of Life ſeem plain to moſt of us: and ſo we are tempted to conclude, there is no Occaſion for Inſtruction in them. But how came they to be thus plain? Why, principally becauſe we have always had Inſtruction. Conſider thoſe Nations that have little: for none are intirely deſtitute; every where Parents teach their Children, and all Men teach one another, ſomething: but ſtill is the Whole of their Duty plain to them? There are doubtleſs Parts of it, which they cannot well avoid underſtanding: and they might, with all their Diſadvantages, underſtand more than they do: but can they every one of them, with Eaſe find out the Whole? How dreadful a Condemnation muſt they, who affirm this, paſs on Millions at once, for having found out ſo little? We Chriſtians are more charitable, and think their Darkneſs, though not a

[f] Luke xii. 57.

Juſtification,

Justification, yet a considerable Excuse: but then we must insist, that Light would be a great Blessing to them, and that Instruction is necessary to introduce it. For what wretched Ignorance of most evident, and what strange Belief of most absurd, Things, in Religion and Morals, doth all History shew to have prevailed, for successive Ages, through Nations, knowing and learned in other Respects, but untaught in this?

Nay, to look no farther than ourselves: how many do we see of low Capacity, that, with the best Help, know little, and, with less, would scarce know any Thing? How many of better Capacity want Leisure from worldly Cares, and would have no Time for Improvement, if the frequent Return of this Day did not give it them? How many, even with Leisure, would never turn their Minds to the Consideration of their Duty, if they were not called to it so loudly here, and Knowledge in a Manner forced upon them? How many indeed, of higher Rank as well as lower, appear after all very poorly grounded in the most important Principles and Precepts?

It must be considered too, that our own Reason, had we ever so much of it, and ever

ſo much Time and Inclination to uſe it, cannot teach us all that we are concerned to know; but there are Doctrines of the greateſt Moment to fallen Creatures, as we are, to be learnt from Revelation. Nor is it ſufficient, that each Man ſtudy theſe in the Bible for himſelf. God hath expreſſly provided, that ſome ſhall inſtruct others in them. Books, written in diſtant Countries and Ages, cannot be intelligible otherwiſe. And ſeveral very intereſting Parts of Scripture are plainly ſuch, that were moſt Men aſked, as the Eunuch was by Philip, *Underſtandeſt thou what thou readeſt?* they muſt anſwer, as he did, *How can I, except ſome Man ſhould guide me*[g]*?* And well may they admit ſuch Guides, as deſire to lead them, only by proving that the Way is right.

But further: were every ſingle Dictate, both of Reaſon and Revelation, ever ſo eaſy to be underſtood; yet the Number of them, ariſing from the various Relations, in which we ſtand to our Maker and our Fellow-creatures, is much too great to afford any Hope of their being all diſtinctly apprehended by all, unleſs it be made the Buſineſs of ſome, to point them out to the reſt. Or, though we could each,

g Acts viii. 30, 31.

of ourselves, form a general Notion of the Whole: yet particular Circumstances often perplex a general Duty; and raise considerable Doubts, what ought to be done; where still it is of great Consequence to do right. The very wisest frequently need Advice in such Cases: much more then must it be of standing Use to others.

Besides: what is in itself extremely evident may appear, to a prejudiced Mind, uncertain or absurd. And it is very common for Men to be prejudiced greatly against plain Truths: sometimes through Ignorance or Weakness; but much oftener, that wrong Belief may quiet them in wrong Practice. No one indeed can directly believe what he will, merely because he will: but many have strange Arts of misrepresenting Things, and putting fair Masks upon foul Errors; which public Instruction is excellently fitted to pull off; and preserve all, who are not obstinate in cheating themselves, from final Ruin. Minds that have a wrong Bias, if suffered to proceed without Contradiction, would mould their Religion into almost any Shape they pleased: and great Numbers of well-meaning Persons would either fall of their own Accord, or be led by others, into childish and hurtful Superstitions.

ſtitions. For human Nature hath always been found exceeding prone to them: and the preaching of the Goſpel in its Purity is the ſafeſt and moſt effectual Preſervative againſt them. But it is not Superſtition, or Enthuſiaſm, alone, that endangers the Welfare of Mankind, whatever ſome would have us think. Theſe undoubtedly may be pernicious: but Profaneneſs and Profligateneſs muſt: which in all Ages have been too generally practiſed, but in ours are openly defended. Such a Situation of Things makes it doubly neceſſary, that Religion and Virtue ſhould have a full Hearing. Whoever barely wiſhes well to civil Society, cannot fail to be in ſome Degree concerned for their Support. And whoever is in earneſt a Chriſtian, will think it of the higheſt Importance, to the future as well as preſent Happineſs of Men, that the Arguments for our holy Faith be propoſed to the World in their genuine Force; the Objections, which may cauſe Uneaſineſs to good Minds, and furniſh Matter of Triumph to bad ones, anſwered; and the diſingenuous Artifices of Unbelievers expoſed.

But making known to us what we have to do, to hope and to fear, is only the firſt Advantage of religious Inſtruction. Though we every one of us knew it completely already; yet

yet unleſs we always recollected it too, as often as there was Need, and were influenced by it, frequent Admonition would ſtill continue extremely uſeful. Very often the moſt acknowledged Truths are the leaſt regarded. They are ſo familiar to us, that they have no Effect, but when placing them in a ſtronger Light awakens us into a diſtincter Attention to them. But eſpecially what affords us no Pleaſure, as our Duty too ſeldom doth, we are very apt to paſs over as ſlightly, as poſſible. The World attracts our Eye with a vaſt Variety of Objects, infinitely more agreeable: to theſe we give up our whole Souls, and are totally loſt in vehement Purſuits or vain Amuſements. The ſerious Conſideration, what we ought to do in Life; and what will follow, if we do it not; ſeldom preſents itſelf to us, and is little encouraged, when it doth. If we think, it is of other Matters: if we read, it is for other Purpoſes: if we have Friends, they will ſcarce look on it as their Buſineſs to be more concerned for us, than we are for ourſelves: or, if they were, often they dare not attempt to ſet us right: and too often they, who paſs for ſuch, are moſt artfully induſtrious to lead us wrong. Then, beſides the Multitudes of thoſe

who are almoſt abſolutely inattentive to their Duty, how many are there, who impoſe on themſelves with flattering Imaginations, that they perform it faithfully, when they do not: blind to Faults and Defects, that every one elſe diſcerns in them: proud of merely ſeeming, or merely ſuperficial, good Qualities; and having the *Name* and Shew of *living*, while indeed they *are dead*[h]! Now both the thoughtleſs and the preſumptuous muſt be brought to a right Senſe of their Condition, or they are ruined for ever: and what can be ſo likely to do this, as the Voice of public Inſtruction, crying loudly in their Ears; calling the former from Follies and Vanities to the true Buſineſs of Life, and warning the latter againſt fatal Self-deceit? Admonitions from this Place confeſſedly are founded on ſuch an Authority, as warrants us in delivering them with a Spirit and Boldneſs, that Men would not bear in private: and no Part of our Diſcourſes being ever levelled at any one in particular, we can decently and inoffenſively reprove, with whatever Freedom is requiſite, the Errors of all in general; *ſhewing the People their Tranſgreſſion, and the Houſe of Jacob their Sins*[i].

h Rev. iii. 1.

i Iſ. lviii. 1.

But, ſuppoſing Men both acquainted with their Duty, and attentive to their Failures; they may ſtill have great Need of being directed, what Method to take in Order to a Reformation. Not every one, that deſires to become good, any more than every one that deſires to become healthy, knows the eaſieſt and ſafeſt and ſpeedieſt Way to it. Here again therefore ſuch, as have made it their Study, may do great Service: animating the dejected, confirming the doubtful, ſtrengthening the weak: informing each, what particular Dangers are in their Circumſtances moſt to be feared, and by what Means to be avoided; when to fly from Temptation, when to ſtand their Ground againſt it; how to gain Advantages, how to retrieve Loſſes, how to bear up under tedious and ſevere Trials; and become, at Length, in all Things, more than Conquerors. Few, it may be feared, are ſerious enough to think of theſe Helps with the Regard, which they deſerve. But ſome, however, God be thanked, both ſee their Uſefulneſs, and have experienced it. Things of this Nature, indeed, are often moſt effectually taught in private: but public Inſtruction alſo, from Time to Time, enters far into the Par-

ticulars

ticulars of them: though it is, and ought to be, more usually employed in furnishing the more general Means and Motives to Piety and Virtue: opposing to the vehement Passions that assault Men, such lively Representations, as every one cannot make to himself, of the Reasonableness, the Beauty, the Excellency, the Rewards of Religion; the Absurdity, the Deformity, the present Mischiefs, the future Punishments of Sin: stripping each Vice of its specious Disguises, and refuting its plausible Pretences: administering Consolation under the Difficulties of Duty, and the Afflictions of Life: and placing, in a strong Light, both the Glories and the Terrors, that are *ready to be revealed*[k].

Such are the natural Benefits of religious Instruction: and evidently none can be greater. If it answers its End but imperfectly, and hath often been abused to serve bad Purposes: every good Thing in the World is equally liable to the same Charge. Against Abuses, it is perhaps no where better guarded, than in this Nation: nor hath ever been freer from them, than at this Time. Imperfections will always be

k 1 Pet. i. 5.

found

found in what Men are to execute: and will in all Cafes be reprefented by many, as greater than they are. Particularly in the prefent, fome will affect to fhew their own Wifdom, in cenfuring what the public Wifdom hath appointed: fome will revenge themfelves, by condemning an Inftitution, which muft condemn the Notions they advance, and the Lives they lead: fome will be prejudiced to its Difadvantage by perfonal or Party Interefts: and others will be provoked, by Diflike of particular Men, to hate the very Office they fuftain; or, by Difapprobation of fome Parts of an Eftablifhment, to inveigh againft the Whole. And very commonly they, who afford themfelves the feweft Opportunities of being acquainted with public Inftruction, are loudeft in their Complaints, of the wrong and wretched Manner, in which it is given. Now a candid, or an upright Man, would never think himfelf at Liberty, either to find Faults without impartial Examination, or to exaggerate thofe which he might apprehend he did find. And a good, or even a prudent Man, far from laying too great a Strefs on accidental, or fmall, Defects and Inconveniences, would labour to conceal, unlefs it were in order to remedy,

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whatever appeared amiſs, in a Thing of ſuch general Uſefulneſs. For, if teaching Truth, and cautioning againſt Error; if ſetting before Men their Duty, and their Intereſt; if directing them how to ſucceed in their Views, and how to eſcape Dangers; if ſupporting them in a right Courſe of Action, and deterring them from a wrong one, be of Service in any of our Concerns; it muſt be of moſt Service in the moſt important one of all, Religion. And whoever hath Need, either to be taught what he did not ſufficiently know, or to be reminded of what he did not ſufficiently conſider; to be reſtrained from doing Evil, or excited to do Good; to be comforted under the Afflictions of Life, or encouraged againſt the Fears of Death; may certainly be the better, if he will, for the preaching of God's Word. There are few, one ſhould imagine, ſo perfect, as not to have Room left for receiving Advantage from it, in ſome of theſe Ways. And whoever conceives he is, cannot with any Decency tell the World ſo; which in Effect he doth, by ſtaying away from it. At leaſt, he cannot think the Bulk of Mankind hath attained to this Height of Knowledge and Goodneſs: and therefore he ought to countenance, by his Example, what

may

may in all Likelihood be of the greateſt Benefit to thoſe amongſt whom he lives; and, in Proportion as it amends and improves them, will be of no ſmall Benefit to himſelf.

For, that Inſtruction always hath had, and will have, a mighty Influence on the Belief and Practice of Mens Duty, not only the Nature of the Thing, but the Teſtimony of all Hiſtory, ſacred and profane, ſhews. Our firſt Parents were inſtructed by their Creator. Had they not; how quick ſoever the Improvements of a ſelf-taught Philoſopher may be, when deſcribed from mere Imagination, yet Reaſon and Fact make it highly probable, that even had they continued innocent, they would have been very ignorant for a conſiderable Time. But the Entrance of Sin muſt enfeeble and darken their Underſtandings greatly: and had their Knowledge of what they were to do, been ever ſo clear, yet, what they were to expect, and on what Terms, when they had failed of doing it, muſt be ſo very obſcure, that it was of the utmoſt Importance for God to interpoſe and inform them; as we find in Scripture he did by the immediate Notification of a Redeemer. Divine Inſtruction therefore began Religion; and human hath

preserved it. Hence that honourable Character, given to *Abraham* by God himself; *For I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Household after him; and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgement*[l]. This pious Care, for which he was distinguished, seems to have been falling into Disregard amongst the other Men of that Age. And the Consequence was, what it always will be. The Separation of Instruction from Worship separated Morals from Piety: and, when this unnatural Divorce brought them to be considered, as independent Things, the Obligations to Virtue were fatally weakened, the Notions of Religion were greatly corrupted, and, in Proportion as Ignorance increased, Wickedness and Superstition prevailed.

Still there were, in the Heathen World, Persons very eminent for great and good Qualities. And as no stated public Instruction was established among them[m]; they are sometimes produced, as Arguments against the Need of it. But their Number by no Means appears to have been considerable. Less had been said of them, if the Generality of their

[l] Gen. xviii. 19.

[m] See Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 2. c. 4, 6, 7, 16, 22, 26.

Country-

Countrymen had been like them: and what is ſaid, is delivered by Authors, chiefly deſirous of gaining Honour to themſelves, by drawing beautiful Pictures of the Merit of their Heroes. Yet, after all, we find that Merit, even according to the moſt favourable Accounts of it, which heighten it far beyond Truth[n], mixed with great Blemiſhes. Their Piety, the firſt Article of human Duty, if they had any, (for ſeveral of their Syſtems of Philoſophy were inconſiſtent with or unfavourable to it) was groſsly idolatrous: their Love of their Country was greatly injurious to their Neighbours; eſpecially thoſe whom they were pleaſed to call Barbarians: moſt of them were polluted with unlawful, ſome with unnatural, Luſts: and none of them ever ſhewed that Humility of Heart, and deep Senſe of Imperfection and Sin, which belongs to the very beſt of human Creatures. Still, ſhining Accompliſhments they undoubtedly had; but they had alſo generally private Inſtructors at leaſt, from whoſe Leſſons they might in a good Meaſure derive them: or copied them, though not taught in Form, from thoſe, with whom they converſed. Or ſuppoſing the contrary; in every Science, in every common Art, ſome few will make a

[n] See Leland againſt Tindal, Introd. p. 46, &c.

great Progreſs with ſmall Advantages for it: but ſhall we conclude from thence, that any Sort of Knowledge can become general, without being generally taught; and every one do what no one is exhorted, or aſſiſted, to learn? Beſides, the original Poverty and Frugality, the accidental Neceſſities and Diſtreſſes, nay the unaccountable Faſhions and Fancies of ſome Countries and Ages, have brought particular Virtues into Practice and high Repute, and they have been greatly celebrated for them; though deſerving of the ſevereſt Cenſure for their Faults in other Reſpects. And, bad as we are at preſent; it would be doing us great Injuſtice, to prefer upon the Whole, perhaps the beſt of the Heathen Times, but certainly the common Run of them, to ours. The Number is great in itſelf, though ſmall in Compariſon, of ſuch as infinitely excel, in Piety, in Benevolence, in Purity of Heart, the utmoſt Perfection, to which Men, without the Grace of the Goſpel, could attain. But not to inſiſt on theſe, we are without Queſtion in general not only more rational in our Devotions, but milder in our Treatment of each other, and more regular in our Conduct of ourſelves. An impartial Reader of the *Greek* and *Roman* Authors, eſpecially of ſuch as

lived

lived in the Times of which they ſpeak, will eaſily ſee and acknowledge this. But were it otherwiſe, their wanting Inſtruction, and our having it, cannot poſſibly be the Reaſon, that we are inferior to them: but we, without it, ſhould have been ſtill much worſe; and they, with it, ſtill much better. Indeed, they were ſenſible, whatever we are, how great Need they had of it: and accordingly the beſt of them, ſome after taking long Journeys to inform themſelves, made it their Buſineſs to teach others, who applied to them, the wiſeſt Rules they could, for the Conduct of Life. But they plainly found, both their Knowledge ſo imperfect, and their Authority ſo inſufficient; that they declared, of their own Accord, what many now ſet themſelves to deny; that Interpoſition from above was requiſite to inform and influence Mankind.

This Advantage the Poſterity of *Abraham* enjoyed. And though they did not receive from it near the Good they might; as indeed we none of us ever do from any Advantage; yet it produced, beſides the more diſtinguiſhed Examples of Piety and Holineſs, mentioned in Scripture, and doubtleſs many others, a conſiderable Degree of national Faith in the one true God, and Obedience to his Laws;

which was not only a Bleſſing to that ſingle Country, but ſcattered ſome Rays of Light through all the People, that ſat in Darkneſs round them. And no ſooner had they learnt from their Captivity, inflicted on them for their Neglect of the divine Commands, to ſet up and carry on a more conſtant and extenſive Courſe of Inſtruction, than they had done before, by *reading* and interpreting the Scriptures *every Sabbath Day in the Synagogues*[o] of every City; than their inveterate, and till then incurable, Diſeaſe of Idolatry ceaſed from amongſt them almoſt intirely; and they preſerved for many Ages a more uniform Regard to their Duty, than they ſeem to have had, ever ſince they were a Nation.

But at Length, even this Method of Inſtruction being corrupted by the eſtabliſhed Diſpenſers of it, *the Light* itſelf *became Darkneſs*[p]. And then was the proper Seaſon for the great Enlightener of the World to appear: who detected and condemned the Abuſes of this Inſtitution, placed the Conduct of it in better Hands, and forbad his Followers for ever that blind Submiſſion to *the Doctrines of Men, which had made the Commandments of God*

[o] Acts xv. 21. [p] Matth. vi. 23.

of no Effect[q]. Nor did he only purify, but perfect it with inestimable Additions of new Knowledge: whence he tells his Apostles, immediately after the Text: *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have desired to see those Things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* After which, his concluding Care was to provide, by due Regulations, for the perpetual Support of this Ordinance; and promise the Ministers of it, that *he would be with them alway, even unto the End of the World*[r]. We are therefore not only to esteem it, as a prudent and useful Thing; but to reverence it, as the Appointment of our Lord and Master; and attend on it in faithful Expectation of his Blessing. For under whatever Disadvantages of human Weakness the Gospel is often preached, it is still *the Power of God unto Salvation*[s], to all that hear it, as they ought. Nor can we hope, that he who *resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble*[t], will give it those, who set up their own Wisdom against that of Heaven; which hath expressly ordained *Pastors and Teachers, for*

[r] Matth. xxviii. 20. [s] Rom. i. 16. [t] James iv. 6.
[q] Matth. xv. 6, 9.

the

the Edifying of the Body of Christ[u]. And ſo effectually did this Method, unaſſiſted by human Art or Power, build up the Church in Spite of all Oppoſition of every Kind; that, in a ſmall Compaſs of Time, the Chriſtian Faith was diffuſed through the Earth, drove Atheiſm, Idolatry and Vice into Corners, wherever it appeared; and planted in their Stead, rational Piety, benevolent Virtue, moral Self-government, founded on the ſure Proſpect of eternal Felicity.

Happy would Mankind have been, had the Purity and good Influence of this excellent Doctrine been preſerved, by a careful Uſe of the Means, that recommended it firſt. But, by Degrees, Preachers *handled the Word of God deceitfully*[w], and Hearers *turned away their Ears from the Truth unto Fables*[x]: Inſtruction was partly perverted, partly diſuſed: Error and Superſtition returned in a new Form, and Ignorance and Wickedneſs again overſpread the World. Once more, two Centuries ago, the Reſtoration of a preaching Miniſtry reſtored Truth and Freedom amongſt us: and keeping up a due Reſpect for it, is our great Security againſt the dreadful Alternative of open Profaneneſs and Profligateneſs, or Popiſh

[u] Eph. iv. 11, 12. [w] 2 Cor. iv. 2. [x] 2 Tim. iv. 4.

Darkneſs

Darkneſs and Tyranny: the former of which Evils, in all Likelihood, if ever it prevails, will ſoon make Way for the latter. And therefore religious Inſtruction, which guards us at once againſt both, is a moſt important public Good.

Its private Advantage to particular Perſons ſeems indeed often to be ſmall. Multitudes there are, as bad, notwithſtanding it, as one can well imagine they would be without it: and for this Reaſon ſome deny its Benefit. But ſurely it is a ſtrange Objection againſt the Uſefulneſs of a Medicine, that they who refuſe to take it, or neglect to take it regularly, are never the better for it. Many deſpiſe and ridicule this Inſtitution; and yet from Time to Time gravely complain of the little Good it doth, whilſt they are diligently endeavouring, that it ſhall do ſtill leſs. And of the reſt of Mankind, few attend it ſo conſtantly as they ought, and fewer ſtill with a due Degree of right Diſpoſition. Yet after all, the Number made truly and inwardly religious and virtuous by it, is not contemptible; thoſe that are amended in Part, or kept back from being miſchievouſly wicked, are very large: and in how much worſe a Condition we ſhould quickly be, were it laid aſide, is abundantly more

more eaſy to foreſee, than ſafe to try. Too much Trial indeed we have had already: more than enough to find, that as the Contempt of God's Word and Worſhip increaſes, Idleneſs, Debauchery, Diſhoneſty, ſpread through the Generality of Mankind: Evils, which one ſhould think every one is greatly concerned to prevent, but eſpecially the upper Part of the World, both for the Sake of their Inferiors and their own. How far the ſame bad Conſequences have taken Place amongſt themſelves, might perhaps appear diſreſpectful to ſay: but we may ſurely beg, that they and all Men would ſeriouſly conſider, what one good Effect they have ever obſerved to follow from diſregarding the appointed Exerciſes of Religion: in what better Way the Time, allotted for theſe Exerciſes, is generally employed by thoſe, who frequent them not; and what Harm could poſſibly follow, if, from Obedience to the Command of God, from a Reſpect to public Authority, from Concern for public Welfare, from Tenderneſs for their own private Reputation, and (may we not add?) from Hope of poſſibly receiving ſome little Improvement too, they ſhould prevail on themſelves to ſpend at Church, every Week, a few of thoſe Hours, which they do

not ſeem, on other Occaſions, to reckon ſo very precious. Doing this, and requiring thoſe who depend on you to do it alſo, you cannot have Occaſion to regret very bitterly: omitting it, whatever you think now, perhaps you may, certainly you will, repent: God grant the Time may come, before it is too late. Let us therefore now make this, amongſt others, one Trial of our ſpiritual State, whether *we have loved the Habitation of God's Houſe, the Place where his Honour dwelleth*[y]: whether we *receive the Word with all Readineſs of Mind*[z], and *deſire the ſincere Milk of it*, as St. *Peter* expreſſes himſelf, *that we may grow thereby*[a]. If not, let us ſtir up ourſelves to the more conſtant and zealous Practice of a Duty, which the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* enjoins as an indiſpenſable one, even in the Midſt of ſevere Perſecutions: with whoſe Words I conclude. *Let us hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering, and provoke one another unto Love and good Works, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the Manner of ſome is, but exhorting one another: and ſo much the more, as ye ſee the Day approaching*[b].

[y] Pſ. xxvi. 8. [z] Acts xvii. 11. [a] 1 Pet. ii. 2.
[b] Heb. x. 23, 24, 25.

SER-

SERMON XII.

LUKE viii. 18.

Take Heed therefore how ye hear.

EVERY Advantage, beſtowed on us by Providence, is a Truſt, of which we muſt hereafter give Account. The Advantages, which tend more immediately to our Improvement in Piety and Virtue, are a Truſt of the moſt important Kind: and religious Inſtruction holds a principal Rank amongſt theſe. Its Nature is excellently fitted to do Men Good: the Grace of God is ever ready to accompany it: and yet very frequently it fails of its End. Doubtleſs too often this is our Fault, who are employed to diſpenſe it. We do not preach, we do not live, as we ſhould: may God be merciful to us and amend us: for heavy will be our Condemnation, if we wilfully tranſgreſs, or ſupinely neglect, either Part of our Duty. But the Word of God, even when delivered by unſkilful

ſkilful and wicked Hands, hath Power enough to produce its Effect, if received as it ought: and though delivered by the ableſt and beſt, too commonly, for Want of being ſo received, produces none. *Preachers of Righteouſneſs*, from the Days of *Noah*[a] to this, have found their Warnings in a great Meaſure fruitleſs. Prophets, expreſsly commiſſioned from Heaven, have been rejected or diſregarded by thoſe, to whom they were ſent. Nay, the Son of God himſelf, as indeed his whole Hiſtory, but eſpecially his Parable in this Chapter ſhews, met with many, in whoſe Hearts his Doctrine either gained no Reception, or ſoon withered away, or was choked with Thorns; for a few, who brought forth good Fruit, in a greater Degree or a leſs. And if it was needful for him, who *ſpake as never Man did*[b], who confirmed his Diſcourſes by Miracles, and adorned both by a Life of perfect Holineſs, to bid his Apoſtles themſelves *take Heed, how they heard:* much more ought his Miniſters now to give his People the ſame Caution, and they to obſerve it. You think, and very truly, that a great deal is incumbent on us: but do

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 5. [b] John vii. 46.

you

you consider, what is incumbent on yourselves? Our Reasons to desire that our preaching may be successful, are very strong: but yours are yet stronger. If we fail of converting you, provided we endeavour it faithfully, we have *delivered our own Souls*: but if you fail of being converted, you *die in your Iniquity*[c]. The Gospel is *the Savour of Life or of Death*[d], to all that hear it. Those, who are careful to improve by it, God will bless with further Improvements: those, who are not, he will leave in his just Judgement to grow worse and worse: or, to speak the Language of our Saviour just after the Text: *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

Being therefore so deeply concerned in the Matter, let us all consider, with what Disposition of Heart we ought to receive religious Instruction.

1. And, in the first Place, that we should hearken to it with Attention, is exceedingly plain: for else both speaking and hearing are lost Labour. And yet how many are there, who vouchsafe not even so much Regard to the Doctrine of Salvation? Decency perhaps brings

c Ezek. iii. 19. d 2 Cor. ii. 16.

us hither: and a Failure of making our Appearance might be remarked to our Disadvantage: but whether our Minds are absent, cannot be so easily observed: and therefore about that, we are very indifferent. Or we come of Course, without reflecting, what End is designed to be served by it: and, though our Consciences would not let us stay away, yet we have never bethought ourselves, that being here without any Care to become the wiser for it, amounts very nearly to the same Thing. Most however have surely some general Intention of minding what they are about: but in so weak a Degree, that every Suggestion of every Kind overpowers it. Some set their Hearts on the Affairs, and some on the Pleasures of Life so intirely, that these Objects croud in at the most improper Times, and drive out all others. Too many have indulged an indolent Thoughtlessness, till applying their Minds in earnest to any Thing is become extremely difficult and painful to them. Not a few are engaged so deeply in Observation of what they see at Church, that they have no Room left for taking Notice of what they hear. There are Persons too, who have so much to say one to another, that they lose, and make those around them lose, much of what the

Preacher hath to ſay to them all. And frequent mutual Informations, it ſeems, are of ſuch Importance and Neceſſity to be communicated immediately, that even the Duties of hearkening to God's Word, in the Leſſons, and ſinging his Praiſes in the Pſalms, muſt give Way to them. But indeed the beſt diſpoſed, and moſt conſiderate, are not ſo happy always, as to command their own Thoughts. Our Imaginations, however carefully checked, are too apt, on every Occaſion, to preſent us with a Multiplicity of Fancies and Notions, quite foreign to the Buſineſs we are upon: but never more ſo, than in the Midſt of our religious Exerciſes. And when once our Minds are got looſe; an Effect, which the leaſt Accident will produce; then on they run from one Thing to another, hanging together by ſome Kind of whimſical Connection, till we are carried we know not whither: and, if we try to recover ourſelves, are often loſt a ſecond Time in the very Endeavour. Some Degree of this is merely the Weakneſs of our fallen Condition: and ſome have by Nature more of it than others: for which they have indeed Cauſe to be ſorry, yet not to think deſpondingly of their ſpiritual Condition. But ſtill, too much of it is commonly our own Fault.

We have taught ourſelves to be ſo unſettled as we are, by indulging a languid Indifference to the moſt intereſting of all our Concerns; and perhaps too, by delighting in the vain Amuſement, which theſe roving Ideas give us, at the moſt improper Seaſons. The Cure of this bad Habit is very difficult: and therefore our Watchfulneſs againſt its growing upon us ought to be the greater; and our Attempts to root it out, more cloſely followed. We muſt beg of God Pardon for our paſt Neglects, and Aſſiſtance for the Time to come. We muſt imprint on our Minds, beforehand, as deeply as ever we can, the Importance of Inſtruction in our Duty: and come to it with the moſt deliberate and firmeſt Purpoſe of ſtrict Attention. We muſt call ourſelves back immediately, when we find we are wandering: and, without ſtaying at all to diſcover what it was, that led us off, return without Delay to the Subject before us. We muſt alſo make it a Rule to recollect afterwards the principal Things, that have been ſaid to us. For not only this will tie us down to mind them the more, when they are ſpoken; but minding them ever ſo much juſt then, will ſingly be of ſmall Benefit: we muſt think them over and over at Home, till we digeſt them into laſting Nouriſh-

ment;

ment; and, as the Apoſtle directs, give ſuch *earneſt Heed to the Things which we have heard*, that we may not, *at any Time, let them ſlip*[e].

2. But hearing God's Word with Attention will probably do us no Good, unleſs, in the ſecond Place, we hear it alſo without Prejudice againſt it: for elſe we ſhall attend to it, only to find Fault, invent Objections, and ſo lead ourſelves into Error; which may be worſe than Ignorance. Now unreaſonable Partiality is Blame-worthy in all Caſes: but extremely ſo, when it operates to the Diſadvantage of Religion. The Doctrines of natural Piety and Morality are confeſſedly of the plaineſt and greateſt Uſe to the preſent Peace and Comfort, as well as the future Happineſs of Mankind. And thoſe which Revelation hath added, illuſtrate, confirm and ſupply the Defects of the former, in the moſt perfect Degree. Prepoſſeſſion therefore againſt either, is Oppoſition to our own chief Good, to that of the World in general: and every worthy, every prudent Man, who at all underſtands what Chriſtianity is, cannot but hearken to it with Delight, and heartily wiſh to find it true; and when he is convinced it is, deſire to have it conſtantly inculcated on himſelf and his Fellow-

[e] Hebrews ii. 1.

creatures, throughout the Earth. To vain and vicious Minds indeed hearing it faithfully preached muſt give Uneaſineſs. But ſtill ſuch Preaching is the moſt real, the moſt ſeaſonable and neceſſary Kindneſs, that can be done them. Unwelcome Truths will be never the leſs Truths, but much the more dreadful, for their ſtudying to diſbelieve them. And therefore the wicked, beyond all others, are concerned, to take Notice of the Threatenings of the Goſpel, lay hold on its Mercies, and examine their Lives by its Precepts; whenever they know, or but ſuſpect, they have acted wrong. Nay, ſuppoſe they have no Suſpicion of that Sort, yet unprejudiced Attention to the Preaching of it can do them no Harm; and may do them more Good, than they think of. We require no implicit Submiſſion to what we teach. We warn you againſt it. So far as our Doctrine is diſcerned by your Reaſon, or felt by your Conſciences, to be true; or appears to ſtand on the Teſtimony of God; ſo far only believe us. *We ſpeak as to wiſe Men: judge ye what we ſay*[f]. All that we aſk is, judge uprightly. For Prepoſſeſſion hurries People to condemn, what they will not have Patience to underſtand:

[f] 1 Cor. x. 15.

they imagine Articles of Faith to be unintelligible, and Rules of Life to be unreaſonable, without the leaſt Foundation; and alarm themſelves and others with Phantoms, the mere Creatures of their own Fancies.

But though irreligious Prejudices always prevail too much: yet there are Times, when Faſhion gives a more than ordinary Countenance to them: when all, that would make a genteel Figure, muſt throw aſide the antiquated Notions of learning their Duty; and think, or ſeem to think, ill or meanly of thoſe who are to teach it. Now whether you have Need to learn any Thing which you did not know, or be reminded of any Thing which you had forgotten, or be excited to any Thing which you neglect, or diſſuaded from any Thing which you practiſe, I muſt leave to your own Conſciences. The Word of God, the Wiſdom of all civilized Nations, the Judgement and Experience of all wiſe Men declare that every one hath Need of theſe Things. And as for us, whoſe Buſineſs is to teach: paying us too much Regard, we acknowledge, is a dangerous Temptation to us; and may do, and hath done, great Harm to true Religion, to Virtue, to human Society: but paying us too little, is full as likely to do Harm. And

we appeal to yourſelves: which Extreme are the People of this Land at preſent moſt inclined to? Certainly you ought to have your Eyes open to our Faults and Imperfections; elſe they will increaſe: but you ought to conſider at the ſame Time, how difficult it is for any Set of Men, and for us in particular, to behave ſo unblameably, as we ſhould. And indeed while we diſcharge our Office with any good Degree of Faithfulneſs, the beneficial Nature of it ſhould methinks intitle us to ſome peculiar Share of the Good-will and Candour of Mankind. At leaſt, no one ſhould, either deſignedly or inconſiderately, make ſuch harſh Interpretations of what we ſay or do, as would be univerſally thought unjuſt, or uncharitable, with Reſpect to any other Men. For ſuch Treatment will not only injure us, but make us in a great Meaſure uſeleſs to thoſe under our Care: which is a Matter of public Concern. They, who are inſtructed or admoniſhed by one, of whom they think amiſs, let him lay before them ever ſo important Truths, very ſeldom take much Notice of them. Yet this is one Prejudice againſt which you ought to guard with your beſt Diligence. The *Scribes* and *Phariſees* were both ill Men, and our Saviour's bittereſt Ene-

mies: yet since they *sat in Moses' Seat*, were the authorized Instructors of the People, he commanded his Disciples to *observe and do whatsoever* Duties *they bade them*[g]. Ask your own Hearts then, are you thus disposed in Relation to every Truth, which you hear from us; of whom, we hope, you have Cause to entertain a somewhat better Opinion, than of them?

But they, who have no general Prejudice against religious Instruction or the Dispensers of it, have notwithstanding too often very blameable Antipathies to particular Subjects. Some are highly pleased, when we enlarge on Points of Faith: but hate to hear those of Practice much enforced. Others are for practical Discourses only: and forget, that Faith is the necessary Foundation of them; and if it were not, that God hath the same Right to our believing what he teaches, as to our doing what he requires. Some would have Preaching consist wholly of moral Doctrines; and hold Piety in Contempt, as an useless enthusiastical Thing: though both Reason and Scripture say, it *is the first and great Commandment*[h]. Others despise Morality, as an inferior heathenish Attainment: and think only the sublimer Parts of

[g] Matth. xxiii. 2, 3.

[h] Matth. xxii. 38.

Religion

Religion ſhould be taught: though the Apoſtle ſaith expreſſly, *I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they, who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good Works: theſe Things are good and profitable unto Men*[1]. Many will pay great Attention to the gracious Promiſes of the Goſpel: but little or none to its Laws and Threatenings. Or, if they are willing we ſhould dwell on ſome Precepts, which not they, but their Neighbours, tranſgreſs; ſtill they turn a deaf Ear to all that can be ſaid on others: and one would except his unjuſt Gains, a ſecond his vicious Pleaſures, a third his vain Amuſements, a fourth his Ill-humour, a fifth his cauſeleſs Separation, from being any proper Matter of our Animadverſion. In ſhort, with moſt Hearers, ſome Points are in ſuch Favour, that they can hardly be repeated too often, or carried too far: and others ſo unwelcome, that the very Mention of them gives Offence. They have not Patience enough to diſcern the true State of the Queſtion: much leſs to obſerve the Force of the Arguments for it; or conſider the Anſwers to their Objections againſt it: but reject immediately with Anger, whatever thwarts their Inclination, or preconceived Opinion: unmindful of the Prophet's Reproof

[1] Tit. iii. 8.

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to the Jews of old: *This is a rebellious People, that will not hear the Law of the Lord: which ſay to the Seers, See not: and to the Prophets, Propheſy not unto us right Things, ſpeak unto us ſmooth Things, propheſy Deceits*[k]. But however apt we are to think otherwiſe, both our Buſineſs and our Intereſt is, not to ſhut our Eyes againſt Inſtruction, but make Uſe of the Light it offers; not to fence againſt Conviction, but lay open our Hearts to the Impreſſion of Truth, be it ever ſo painful; *and receive with Meekneſs the ingrafted Word, which is able to ſave our Souls*[l]. For thoſe Duties, which we the leaſt like to hear of, may be, and often are, the moſt needful to be inculcated upon us of all others. Thoſe Doctrines, of which we are the moſt firmly perſuaded, may, for ought we know, unleſs we have examined them well, be great Miſtakes. And even ſuppoſing them true, yet attending only to one Part of the Truth, may lead us into Error.

3. The third Diſpoſition, requiſite in attending on the Word of God, is Seriousneſs of Heart. There are many, who have no poſitive Prejudices, founded on ſeeming Arguments againſt it, but ſo thoughtleſs and giddy, that

k Iſ. xxx. 9, 10. l James i. 21.

they

they flight it moft furprifingly. At beft, they look on what is delivered from hence, as fomething of Courfe to be faid, and not to be minded. But in their livelier Moods they can divert themfelves extremely with the moft folemn Exhortations; and their Gaiety is apt to rife the higher, the more earneftly their Duty is preffed upon them. Now undoubtedly the Exertion of a cheerful Temper, when regulated by good Senfe and Propriety, is very innocent, as well as agreeable. But to feek for Matter of Drollery in every Thing; and drefs up Subjects of the utmoft Importance in ludicrous Difguifes, to delight ourfelves and others with laughing at them, is the fillieft Affectation of Wit, and the moft dangerous Kind of Folly. Remember then: what your Maker enjoins, what your eternal Happinefs or Mifery depends on, is worthy of the moft awful Attention, even of the moft fprightly Mind: befides that the fame Levity, which inclines Men to play thus with religious Truths, ufually difpofes them to treat the weightieft Affairs of common Life with the fame Sort of fportful Indifcretion, till at Length *the End of that Mirth is Heavinefs*[m], even in this World.

[m] Prov. xiv. 13.

Sometimes indeed Want of ſerious Regard to what we hear, may not ſeem altogether inexcuſable. Subjects of the greateſt Moment may be handled ſo improperly, as to diſguſt even the well-meaning; and poſſibly raiſe contemptuous, inſtead of devout Reflections. But as it muſt be a very wrong Heart, that takes Occaſion to be thus moved, where none is given: ſo if much be given, which ſurely is not frequently the Caſe, it cannot be a right Heart, which dwells on ſuch Things only, or chiefly. Conſider: here you come, in Obedience to the Appointment of God, to learn or recollect the Doctrines and the Precepts, that lead to Salvation. One or more of them are accordingly laid before you and recommended to you: but unhappily with ſome Peculiarity, it may be, of Phraſe or Manner; ſome Arguments not of the ſtrongeſt, ſome Irregularity of Method, or Want of Livelineſs or Prudence; in ſhort, ſome Mixture or other of human Infirmity. Ought theſe Defects, be they ever ſo real, though poſſibly after all they are but imaginary, to change the important Buſineſs you are upon, into an ill-natured Amuſement: and turn you aſide, from the Improvement of your own Souls, to an idle Criticiſm upon another Man's Performance? Or is

it

it the Concern of every one of us, to profit by all we can, ſupply what is wanting, add Strength to what is weak; and paſs lightly over the Imperfections of our Inſtructors, remembering our own?

But they, who by no Means hear Sermons with Contempt, will yet be far from due Seriouſneſs, if they hear them only with Curioſity. And this it may be feared is a very common Caſe. We want to have ſome faſhionable Controverſy diſcuſſed, ſome difficult Paſſage of Scripture explained, ſome darling Speculation enlarged on, ſome plauſible Hypotheſis propoſed: in a Word ſomething told us, that may prove a pleaſing Exerciſe of our Underſtandings at the Time, and a Help to Converſation afterwards. Diſcourſes, of which we can make this Uſe, we ſeldom think of putting to any better: of ſuch as we cannot, we ſoon grow weary, and hearken impatiently after other *Teachers having*, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *itching Ears*[n]. Thus we pay moſt earneſt Attention to what we hear: and receive abſolutely no Good from it. For filling our Heads, in this Manner, is rather the Way to corrupt our Hearts, than to amend them. Learning and Ingenuity are doubtleſs

[n] 2 Tim. iv. 3.

of

of great Service in explaining, defending, and adorning Religion. But ſtill the Things, which a ſerious Man will chuſe to have moſt inſiſted on in the Pulpit, are thoſe which he is moſt concerned to practiſe, and moſt liable to fail in, the plain common Rules of a Chriſtian Life. There is Nothing new perhaps in ſuch Diſcourſes: Nothing, but what you have often heard and well remember. But have you minded it as effectually as you ought? Searching into this may poſſibly be new enough to you; how agreeable, God and yourſelves know beſt: but it is needful, without Queſtion. Repeating to you ever ſo often the Precepts, which you are conſcious you obſerve, will give you Pleaſure. And the more unpleaſing the Repetition of the reſt is, the more neceſſary it will be. "This Kind of Preaching hath no Entertainment in it." Very true. But is it for Entertainment that you come to the Houſe of God? Such as do, muſt not take it amiſs to be diſappointed; but ſubmit, inſtead of what they wiſh, to have what they want, given them; the Knowledge of their Duty, their Sins, their Saviour, their Grounds of Hope or Fear in Relation to Eternity. At leaſt, whatever they might like for themſelves,

they

they muſt permit others to *have the Goſpel preached to them*[o].

But ſuppoſing you are ever ſo deſirous to hear Sermons ever ſo proper: on what Account do you deſire it? Perhaps only to enjoy the Satisfaction, which a well-compoſed Diſcourſe naturally affords. Your Ear is gratified, your Sentiments are enlivened, agreeable Emotions of various Kinds are excited. So the Hearer is pleaſed, the Speaker commended, and followed; but with no Thought of practiſing one Word he hath ſaid. This is the Turn of Mind, ſo admirably deſcribed, many Ages ago, by the Prophet *Ezekiel. Son of Man, the Children of thy People ſtill are talking of thee*[p] *by the Walls and in the Doors of the Houſes, and ſpeak one to another, every one to his Brother, ſaying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the Word, that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come and ſit before thee as my People; and they hear thy Words, but they will not do them: for with their Mouth they ſhew much Love, but their Heart goeth after their Covetouſneſs*; their worldly Deſires of whatever Sort. *And lo, thou art unto them as a very*

[o] Matth. xi. 5.

[p] This is the marginal, and the right tranſlation.

lovely

lovely Song, of one that hath a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument: for they hear thy Words, but they do them not[q]. Religious Instruction could never be appointed to give such empty, insignificant Delight as this: nor doth it in the least attain its proper End, unless it influences Men to forget the Preacher, and think of themselves: unless it raises in them, not a superficial Complacency, or an idle Admiration; but an awful Solicitude about their eternal Welfare, and that a durable one.

Constitutional Warmth of Temper is often blown up into a pious Flame, that goes out almost as suddenly, as it was kindled. Lively Affections are experienced; excellent Designs are formed; every Thing promises wonderfully well for a Time; and then sinks down into Nothing. Or, it may be, Men are moved anew, and resolve anew, at every good Sermon they hear: but they cool again long before the next, and bring no Fruit to Maturity. Now a Life of religious Feelings and Intentions, with an irreligious Failure of acting suitably to

[q] Ezek. xxxiii. 30, 31, 32.
See an excellent Discourse of *Musonius* the Philosopher on this Subject. *A Gell*, l. 5. c. 1. See also *Arr. Epict*, l. 3. c. 23. And the Character of *Socrates*'s Discourses given by *Alcibiades* on his own Experience. *Plat. Conviv*. See also *Seneca*, Ep. 52.

 them,

them, is not the Life of a Chriſtian, nor will it ever procure us the Reward of one.

4. There ſtill remains then a fourth Requiſite, without which, however attentive, impartial, and ſerious, we are; we ſhall fall ſhort; but towards which all theſe Qualities greatly contribute: and what that is, the Apoſtle plainly ſignifies to us, where he ſaith, *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith, in them that heard it*[r]. And the Faith, that we muſt have, to make it profit us, is not a mere hiſtorical Perſuaſion of the Truth of the Goſpel, though with this we are to begin; but a deep Senſe of our Need of God's Mercy promiſed in it; a thankful Acceptance of the Terms, on which that Mercy is offered; an humble Reliance on a crucified Saviour for Pardon, Grace and Strength; with a firm Dependance on having theſe Bleſſings conveyed to us, through a right Uſe of the Means, which he hath ordained for that End; his Word, and Sacraments, and Prayer. Such *Faith* indeed muſt *come by hearing* at firſt, as the Apoſtle hath obſerved[s]. But this is no Objection againſt the Neceſſity of exerciſing it afterwards, in Order to hear as we ought: and exerciſing duly our

[r] Heb. iv. 2. [s] Rom. x. 17.

present lower Degree of it, is the only Way to obtain a higher. Every one therefore, who desires Benefit from religious Instruction, must attend on it with Humility of Heart, as a fallen, sinful, undeserving Creature; to whom it makes known a Method of Recovery, which of himself he could never have found out or imagined. He must *receive it*, when delivered conformably to Scripture, *not as the Word of Men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God*[t], must labour to strengthen his Conviction of these Things. He must apply earnestly to Him, whose Gift Faith is, for that *Faith* in his Gospel, *which worketh by Love*[u]. For when once we come to love our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, we shall hear the very hardest Parts of our Duty with willing Minds, and perform the Whole with a cheerful and persevering Zeal: till which Time, all remains imperfect and ineffectual. Every Attainment that comes short of uniform universal Obedience, however specious it be, leaves us in Effect very nearly, if not quite, where we were. St. *James*'s Comparison is perfectly just. *Be ye Doers of the Word: and not Hearers only, deceiving your own*

[t] 1 Thess. ii. 13. [u] Gal. v. 6.

ſelves. For if any be a Hearer of the Word, and not a Doer; he is like unto a Man, beholding his natural Face in a Glaſs. For he beholdeth himſelf, and goeth his Way; and ſtraitway forgetteth what Manner of Man he was[w]. Yet this too plainly appears to be the common Method. A great Part, even of thoſe, who come to hear from a Principle of Conſcience, ſuch as it is, mind exceedingly little at the Time, reflect leſs afterwards, and continue juſt the ſame Men they were before. They wonder indeed, that their Neighbours take no more Notice of what is ſaid; and can even wreſt Paſſages in Sermons to Meanings, which they were never intended to have, and are ſcarce, if at all capable of, in order to point them againſt the Faults of others; while they think not in the leaſt of correcting their own, be they ever ſo plainly deſcribed: as if Religion were made for every one elſe to practiſe, but themſelves. It would really ſeem, quite impoſſible, if daily Experience did not ſhew it, that Men could be told ſo plainly, and warned ſo frequently, of Tranſgreſſions and Follies, which they cannot deny to be ſuch, by which often they not only do great

[w] Jame. i. 22, 23, 24.

Harm,

Harm, but ſuffer great Uneaſineſs, in this World, and which they are ſenſible muſt bring on them, if not forſaken, the heavieſt Vengeance of God in the next; yet ſit all the While as unconcerned, as if the Diſcourſe were about ſome perfectly indifferent Matter; and go away at laſt, without ſo much as a ſingle Thought of ever changing their Conduct. Or if they do think of reforming, it is at ſome diſtant Time; like *Felix, when they have a convenient Seaſon* [x]; and this they look on as a very pious Intention: whereas indeed it is only determining to live on wickedly for the preſent, and leave off they know not when. Or they reſolve from henceforward to perform ſome Parts of their Duty, the more eaſy, or profitable, or faſhionable, perhaps: but neglect the reſt, as much as ever. Or they go farther, and will break looſe from all their Sins: but they will not avoid thoſe Temptations, that muſt in all Likelihood bring them back ſoon into their former Bondage; nor make Uſe of thoſe Means, that would *preſerve* them from it. Thus, one Way or other, they contrive to *hear the Word, and not to do it*: and all they

x Acts xxiv. 25.

get by this artful Management, at St. *James*, in the Paſſage abovementioned, hath excellently obſerved, is *deceiving their own ſelves*. For God we can never deceive; Men we very ſeldom do; nay even ourſelves, for the moſt Part, we are able to cheat but poorly; and could we ſucceed in it as completely, as we wiſh, we ſhould be only the more irretrievably ruined.

Take Heed therefore, how ye hear: and begin your Care with conſidering ſo ſeriouſly, and improving ſo faithfully, what hath been delivered to you for that Purpoſe now, that you may reap the trueſt and utmoſt Advantage you can, from whatever ſhall be any where taught you hereafter. *Laying aſide all Malice, and all Guile and Hypocriſy, as new born Babes, deſire the ſincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby*[y]*: grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lrd and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt: to Him be Glory, both now and for ever. Amen*[z].

y 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. z 2 Pet. iii. 18.

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.